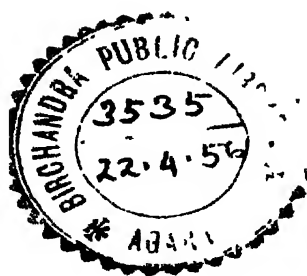


# A ROSE FOR MARIANNE

by  
F. T. GILES



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**MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY  
EBENEZER BAYLIS AND SON, LTD., THE  
TRINITY PRESS, WORCESTER, AND LONDON**

**F.755**

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**A MA BELLE-MÈRE**



## PIERRE AND ANNE

LIKE ALL FRENCHMEN who have to earn their living, Pierre Deschamps was never happy unless his wife was working at his side, and so this thirteenth day of July, 1870, his twenty-sixth birthday, he spent in a sense of vague uneasiness because his wife Anne was unwell.

Rain had fallen most of the day and Pierre had spent it threshing corn in his barn. Usually it was a work he loved, but for one alone he found it a melancholy timeless business.

With Anne standing a yard from him the two flails swung bravely up into the high roof of the barn and fell with quick sharp beats upon the prostrate corn. The grain flew around their feet in a golden shower with every blow.

'Clap-clap, clap-clap' they went, but there was no music with every second 'clap' left out, no sense of comradeship as when working together he could see his wife half-turned from him, her slim body tense and her firm sunburnt arms rising and falling with the flail, her serious face pale and her hair and shoulders covered with a powder of dust.

Twice he had taken her a tisane of camomile and stood over her as she drank the mixture. He had even suggested tea and had handed her the canister in which it was kept. Anne had opened the tin and looked at the leaves speculatively. They were grey with age and smelt more of a musty sweetness now than of tea. Then she had put down the canister.

'I'm not so ill as that,' she said, and Pierre went back disconsolately to his flail.

He was tall—for a Frenchman, very tall, with a slight stoop. Bending over his lesser neighbours he suggested something of a kindly Gulliver trying to be of service to the Lilliputians. He listened to them patiently and for this reason they came to him often and would have come more but for the fact that he had a disconcerting habit which Anne had not noticed until after their marriage of chuckling whenever anyone began to tell tall stories. Frenchmen are as prone to add a cubit to their achievements as anyone else. The proper way to receive them, Anne thought, was

the preservation of a stony silence or a protesting '*Mais, mon vieux*'. But Pierre looked down benevolently at the narrator and chuckled audibly, unrestrainedly, inopportunately. However, nobody but Anne seemed to notice the peculiarity—or at least to protest against it—and in time she accepted it as a characteristic she could not cure.

The peasant of the farm was Anne. It was she who sniffed the morning air and peered up at the clouds and noted the sunsets and sun-risings, and the direction of the wind, and from them all anticipated the weather. It was she who decided whether the ground was too wet, too cold or too dry for sowing; she who decided when the cows should calve and superintended their deliverance. Pierre soon saw that she was a greater master of these arts than he and, humble-minded fellow that he was, contentedly followed in her lead.

If he had any ambition at all it was a singular one—one which if put into words would have astounded him as much as anyone. He looked forward to the day when he would be a grandfather and this at a time when he had as yet no children of his own.

He perhaps felt that with his children would come the need for greater effort and longer hours of toil. He was not lazy and would plod on steadily at his work, but he found many things in the day to take his attention from it. He had not yet lost the child's love of toys and of playing with them, and he would talk as happily and absorbedly with school children as with grown-ups. At the time when his grandchildren came along, he would be able to ease up a little—the time never was even up to twenty-six when Pierre was not ready to ease up a little—and he would buy a tiny pony or a donkey and a trap to match which he and they would drive round the neighbourhood; or he would make a mill, a real working model which would turn in the stream which ran through his fields.

Even now he could never resist a boy's request for a whistle made out of a branch of sycamore or for a catapult, and it could not always be a coincidence that at midday, when the village children turned out of the church in which the priest kept a school for those who could pay his modest fees, Pierre was so often seen walking with them.

Of his three books Pierre had one something like that popular English work labelled *Inquire Within for Everything*. It was called *Here One Learns All* and provided him with a wealth of astonishing information which he tried out on the priest's young scholars.

'What river is Madrid on?' he would ask.

'If Mont Blanc was picked up and put in the North Sea would it poke out of the water?'

The mere notion of such an enterprise usually took their youthful breath away. A startled '*Je ne sais pas*' was the answer which pleased Pierre most. 'Ah, my poor children,' he would comment, 'you see—you know nothing—nothing.'

'When Queen Victoria was crowned do you know what happened?' 'No.' A tense pause. 'The horses wouldn't pull the carriage. They jibbed. They had to be changed.'

What the authority for this assertion was, Pierre never betrayed. It ministered to his two pet phobias—England, and the rich. The English made a mess of their affairs, and it was a rebuff to the pretensions of the great.

'You see, children'—for the true Frenchman no story is complete or indeed justified if not robust enough to carry a moral—'the grand folk don't have everything as they want it.'

Towards evening the rain ceased and the sun appeared. So did Anne—though not to wield a flail, but to sit on a chair at the open door of the barn watching Pierre, to his great satisfaction.

Anne was a quiet, undemonstrative woman, objective and detached as so many of her countrywomen are in spite of the extraordinarily false reputation Frenchwomen have abroad for levity and excitability. She had said nothing about Pierre's twenty-sixth birthday and he had concluded she had forgotten it. But when at supper a bottle of red wine appeared on the table and a white homespun linen cloth covered its black oilcloth, and an omelette followed soup and a roast chicken the omelette, he knew that she had not forgotten after all.

After the chicken and the salad, Anne ran to the door and bolted it and then sat herself on Pierre's knees. She was stronger than he, much stronger, but to-night she felt frightened and uneasy, and nestling in his arms, with her face hidden against his throat, she got some feeling of escaping from terrors she could sense but not name.

Pierre held her happily. In the failing light he looked round the room in which their lives were passing, at the well-swept gigantic stone slabs of the floor, at the blackened beams above from which a bazaar of utensils, drying seeds and vegetables were suspended, at their great wooden bed in the far corner, at the red embers in the broad open hearth, at the remnant of their feast, back to the slim figure of his wife with her pale face and deep chestnut hair and her grey eyes that met his so steadfastly and so firmly.

He would not have changed his lot with a king.

## 2

## THE CALL OF THE BUGLE

TWO DAYS LATER Pierre was working in one of his meadows on the slopes below La Chataignerie, the hamlet on one edge of which his farm lay. He could see the red roofs of his barn through a group of elms and below him and all round, gently sloping down to a broad river-bed, spread a great vista of meadows, fields, trees and villages framed with a broad circumference of low hills. Beyond, far distant, towered the black and grey outline of the mountains of Auvergne.

All day Pierre had been putting up a fence of stakes and wire to keep the cows from breaking through the live hedge. A month ago, with three others, he had mown the meadow of its heavy fleece of hay, revealing the firm black lines of narrow canals scored across its length which ancestors of Pierre generations ago had cut to spread the waters of a spring at the upper end over the surface and so ensure a heavy crop of hay every year.

Lurking in the crannies of these canals, as none knew better than Pierre, were freshwater crayfish, and all the afternoon they had been tempting him from his work to try his luck in picking them out of their hiding-places, using his own fingers as a bait for their pincers.

Now with the sun at six he at last succumbed to temptation. Rolling up his shirt sleeves to his shoulders he plunged his arm into the sharp cold water and began to feel along the bottom of one of the canals.

At once he became completely absorbed by this agreeable occupation, as was his wont. Thoughts of his work, of the approach of evening with its customary routine, vanished from his mind. Occasionally, with a jerk, he brought up his arm, dripping, from the water to fling a crayfish, clinging desperately to his fingers, on the grass beside him.

Suddenly a sound brought him back to earth. It came from the eastern side of the valley, and he sat up, mouth agape and heart beating heavily. He stared towards Notre-Dame du Pré, the stumpy yellow tower of whose church he could see, picked out in the mellow light of the setting sun amidst a cluster of red roofs. It was the call of the bugle. Pierre knew it well and knew its meaning. He waited. Perhaps he had imagined he had heard it. Again the

call sounded from the same village. It was the recall—the recalling of reservists like himself to the colours.

He did not move. In a moment he knew he would hear another call from villages on the opposite side of the valley. Before many minutes they came, some far away, some loud and near.

Slowly he picked up his tools. The two or three crayfish were left forgotten on the grass to die. On the way back he fell in with other reservists like himself who, too, had heard the call and were taking the first steps to obey it.

Rumour of impending war had reached La Chataignerie a month ago. It was something to do with Spain and Germany. Yesterday people had been saying the Prussian king had insulted their Emperor—quite how, Pierre didn't know.

Anne had heard the bugles, too. Pierre found her putting some underclothes into a bundle and she had put out fresh underclothes for him to change into at once.

She busied herself with a meal and food for him to take with him.

Both of them started when a bugle sounding the same call rang out at the other end of their own village. They half-opened the door and listened. The loud voice of a gendarme read out the news of the proclamation of war and the summons to the reservists to rejoin their units.

The men of La Chataignerie and the other villages and hamlets had to go to Neuvy-le-Roi where, at the barracks, they would find their uniforms and arms awaiting them.

One of them came in to tell Pierre that they had decided to march there together and to leave at nine, after forming up outside Lar-mignat's café where the roads through the village crossed and broadened out into a rough square.

'We'll settle them,' said Pierre as he changed into the black suit he kept for his rare excursions into the towns.

'They're more than we,' murmured Anne.

'They insulted the Emperor,' said Pierre.

'It isn't because of that,' said Anne, who had far more political insight than her husband. 'They want our land.'

'Our land!' echoed Pierre.

'Not our land here,' replied Anne. 'They want Alsace and Lorraine.'

'Yes—and they can go on wanting,' cried Pierre defiantly. 'When we're in Berlin—they'll be lucky if we leave them anything. Berlin, my girl—that's where I'll be in a month.'

Anne was far from sharing his enthusiasm. A voice within her

was beginning to whisper, 'You'll never see him again.' It made her heart beat wildly, and she watched him as he moved about. She could not keep herself from crying and, seeing her, the courage of her simple husband began to fail, too.

'I'll be back before the autumn,' he whispered as he held her close in his arms. 'Before Christmas, anyhow.'

But the voice which was now much louder and insistent kept up its 'You'll never see him again—you'll never see him again.'

Lest she should unman him, Pierre said good-bye in the house and made her promise not to come to see him off with the others. If he broke down in front of them—and he knew he very well might—he would never hear the last of it from his comrades in arms.

It was long after nine before the party—some twenty or thirty men—formed up to march away. Everybody in the village was in the square. Half a dozen torches burned smokily in the dark and Villetorte had got out his cornet and Larmignat his drum, as they always did on these occasions. These, with two or three mouth-organs, took the place of a military band, and round them everyone talked and joked. Every now and then the evening air was filled with the shrieks of nervous, uncontrolled laughter which greeted some witty sally. Whenever a real effort was made to form up the reservists and march them off it was discovered that two or three were still in the cafés, and by the time they were found and brought out, some others had gone off to the same familiar haunts.

Alone in the silent living-room, the blackened cherrywood grandfather clock answered the voice which still kept up its 'You'll never see him again' with a portentous 'No-no-no-no' as the pendulum swung to and fro. It had stood in the same corner for nearly a century, noting the time when new Deschamps were born into the world and ticking out their days, watching their comings and goings with a composure that neither birth, marriage nor death, war nor peace, triumph nor failure, success nor disaster, could disturb.

The clock, the voice and the silence.

Anne could stand them no longer. She crept out into the night and at the gate of the farm stood with eyes and ears straining towards the square. She heard the excited shouts and the loud peals of laughter. The street up to the square was deserted. Everyone was there except her. Despite her promise to Pierre, Anne felt she must see him at least once again, if only to trick and give the lie to that tyrannical voice within her which would give her no peace.

She knew they would not leave at nine. When the conscripts



went off they never left at the time agreed. When they did go she knew the cornet and the crowd would strike up the 'Marseillaise'.

She crept up the street and then turned into the road to Neuville-Roi down which the party would come. Under an elder bush she waited, unseen and silent in its shadow.

At last the familiar strains broke upon the night air. The laughter and the shouting ceased. Everyone joined in singing. Flickering lights of approaching torches began to play on the walls of the houses where the Neuville road turned out of the square.

In the light of the torches Anne, crouching in the shadows, saw the reservists, formed up in ranks, approaching. The crowd was marching beside them and behind. Cornet and drum led the way.

No one noticed Anne even when the column was abreast. She saw Pierre in the last line, head and shoulders above his companions. She rushed towards him. 'Pierre,' she cried. 'Anne.' 'I had to come.' He held her tight in his arms whilst the crowd surged round them.

'You'll come back, Pierre?'

'I'll come back, Anne. You must let me go now.'

'I can't, Pierre. I can't,' cried Anne.

Gently he forced her arms from around him, kissed her hands, her forehead and mouth.

'I must go, Anne,' he said brokenly, and so at a run, turning now and again to wave at the shadowy figure standing motionless in the road, he went.

## 3

## ACTION

THE BARRACKS AT Neuville-Roi was like a beehive ready to send off a swarm. Its great, black, oblong outline stood out in a starry, violet sky. All its scores of windows were alight and a great surging mass of men was gathered round its entrance. Their quiet, subdued mutterings as they talked together merged into a hum-like roar and promised ominous happenings for the morrow.

Pierre and his companions edged slowly through the crowd and made their way into the building. Its narrow passages were choked with men and the rooms where each man's uniform was ready for him in tiers of numbered racks were so packed that often no progress could be made through them at all.

At length, however, the men of La Chataignerie reached their

racks and began to change into uniform. Pierre, coming last, saw at a glance that the uniform on his rack was not his. It was meant for a man two-thirds his height and nearly twice his circumference. The trousers when he tried them on stopped just below the knees and continually escaped from the jack-boots ending not far above the ankles. At the waist they left a gaping pouch.

'Just the thing when you catch a hare,' said Larmignat's son.

The tunic was worse than the trousers. The gilded epaulettes came half-way down his arms. The tail on the other hand hardly passed his waist, looking more like an Eton jacket than the tail-coat it was intended to be. The sleeves were so short that Pierre's great raw-boned hands and fore-arms were bare.

Pierre called the quartermaster to see what a ridiculous misfit he looked. That overwrought officer took a quick glance round at the other men to see if there was a short man with tunic tails touching the floor and treading on his trouser ends. Finding no one who looked like this, he answered as experienced non-commissioned officers all the world over answer. 'Don't matter,' he said, 'you got to go off to-night and you got to go in a uniform. Take the uniform off the first man who's killed that will fit you.'

Early next morning the battalion to which the La Chataignerie men belonged moved off, Pierre's appearance causing the greatest hilarity amongst the rankers and consternation and angry comments from his officers. They marched all day and at evening entrained. The train slowly made towards Paris and then went east, passing through Châlons. It stopped in a wood and everyone got out and marched for a few hours and then marched back along the same road to where the train had dropped them. Then they turned and marched back along exactly the same route, by which time twenty-four hours had passed and wits said there was a war somewhere if only they could find it.

But now they went on past the farthest point of their original march and then broke into companies. Squadrons of cavalry passed them on the road or crossed over the road on which they were marching and disappeared into woods and behind hedges. The Prussians, they felt, could not be so far away now.

Towards evening there was a long halt. The officers anxiously consulted a map. They crossed a broad river—the Marne, some said—by a rickety wooden bridge and then, single file, passed along a footpath in a wood with thick undergrowth.

The sun was setting when they came out of the wood at the top of a ridge giving a wide view over a vast expanse of hilly, wooded

country dotted with farms and an occasional village. Again the map was carefully studied. An officer called raucously for the sergeant of Pierre's company. Another company of the battalion should have joined theirs on this ridge but had not arrived. A man was to go back along the path they had come to find the missing company and to serve as guide to bring them back to their battalion.

The sergeant ran his eye speculatively over his squad. The man selected to be the guide would probably not find the missing company but lose himself. The sergeant regarded the opportunity as heaven-sent to rid him of his ugly duckling. He called to Pierre—tired, heavy with lost sleep, with his uniform mostly in places where it should not be—round his knees and on his back. The sergeant surveyed him for a moment with marked distaste, and then explained the errand he had to undertake. Without a word but overwhelmed with doubt, Pierre picked up his rifle and disappeared into the forest and the deepening night.

For an hour he walked on through the forest, feeling confident that he was on the same path that he had come along with his regiment. But when the river did not appear he began to get anxious. At last he did come to a river but it was obviously much smaller than the one he had crossed on the wooden bridge. Then he knew he was lost. He followed it for some time hoping it would lead him to the larger river but at last, about midnight, feeling completely lost and too exhausted to go on, he decided to sleep until daylight. He had hardly curled himself up under a knot of bushes before he was sound asleep.

When he awoke it was broad daylight, but a glance at the sky showed him it was still early as the sun was not yet up. He washed his hands and face in the river and ate a breakfast of dry bread and sausage.

## 4

## BRIEF ENCOUNTER

LONG AFTER HE HAD finished his meal Pierre sat gazing absently at the river flowing along in front of him. Though he was awake the long, unaccustomed marches and the scanty food he had eaten had left his mind dazed and vacant. In spite of his accoutrements and his uniform he was still a peasant in his thoughts, and they did not remind him of the military errand upon which he

had been sent the night before but winged him away from this silent and gently flowing stream before him, with its tidy banks, to the upper reaches of his beloved Creuse noisily hurrying along its wide stony bed through broad valleys and towering hills. He thought of Anne. By now she would have milked the cows, possibly be at breakfast. He could smell the hot soup scenting the living-room.

Still thinking of Anne and the farm he decided to move, though which way he should go and whether he should still look for the missing company or try to find his own were problems which kept him hesitating and irresolute for some time.

At length he decided to go along the bank of the stream in the direction in which it was flowing, thinking that perhaps it would lead him to the broader river over which he had crossed with his company by the wooden bridge. He walked along with his rifle slung carelessly over his left shoulder, still less than half-awake and such thoughts as filled his somnolent mind far away on his farm to the south.

He turned a sharp bend, when suddenly he heard a harsh staccato call. There was a heavy clatter and he saw about a score of men fling themselves to the ground and a score of rifles were pointed at him. He stood stock-still in astonishment with his rifle slung on his shoulder, too surprised even to think of bringing it to the ready.

Pierre had run into a detachment of the enemy. He could see they were Germans—the field-grey uniforms and the helmets with a spike on top of them showed clearly they were not Frenchmen.

An irresistible urge to laugh seized him. The thought that he had been the cause of sending all these gentlemen to earth flat on their middles just because he had appeared unexpectedly round a bend was something as funny as he had ever known.

Then, rising out of the lank grass in front of the others about a dozen yards from him, appeared Ober-Leutnant Gruben.

He was short and rotund, with a very red face and thick steel-rimmed spectacles. In his right hand he held a naked sword and in his left a revolver. He looked frightened and angry. In his precipitate fall to earth occasioned by the apparition of Pierre, the map cases, binoculars and other impedimenta slung round his shoulders had got tangled up and were now dangling from his neck in front of him. He approached Pierre slowly, one sharp jerky step at a time, glaring at him and never taking his eyes off his face. His thick glasses were not strong enough to give him a good sight of his opponent and so he came on towards Pierre very slowly, very

gingerly, until he was hardly a foot from him, and Pierre found himself looking down into the angry square face of as unsightly a little German as could be found in a day's search through Potsdam itself.

The men in Ober-Leutnant Gruben's command slowly emerged from the grass, remaining in a kneeling position and still covering the Frenchman with their rifles.

Meanwhile Leutnant Gruben had noted with keen disfavour Pierre's unsoldierly appearance: his short trousers loose at the knees instead of being tucked into his boots, his long arms almost bare to the elbows and the tails of his tunic hardly falling below the small of his back. Leutnant Gruben suffered chronically from a belief that the rest of the world had nothing to do but make a fool of him. He came from a family of Junkers who had supplied officers of the accepted type to the Prussian kings for centuries, tall, square men with the faces of embittered, ill-tempered dogs. For some reason nature had given him the appearance of an assistant in a small back-street store; not content with this it had given him that most un-Prussian gift of realizing quite well the impression he made on others. He knew that everyone else, his fellow-officers, his men, this damned Frenchman, too, thought that he looked like an assistant in a small back-street store. And now he felt that Pierre in his extraordinary get-up was making a fool of him and of armies and war generally. This was the sort of creature you would expect to find on the stage of a Paris music-hall. Leutnant Gruben heard the roars of laughter that would greet his appearance and then in a flash he saw that he was part of the comic turn, too, doubling the amusement of the spectators—this tall misfit of a Frenchman and he short and red, peering fiercely up at him as the other bent over him with a benevolent smirk on his features.

Angrily, he turned and called his men to their feet.

He rapped out an order and struck Pierre's rifle with the flat of his sword. Two infantrymen ran forward and dragged the rifle out of his hands with quite unnecessary violence and threw it into the river. Then with a jab at Pierre's middle he spat out another order and the two men pulled the bayonet out of his belt and sent it flying after the rifle.

Ober-Leutnant Gruben now felt that his personal safety could be sufficiently assured by his revolver. He clapped his sword back into its scabbard with a clatter and transferred the revolver to his right hand.

For some minutes he glared in silence at Pierre. Not only had the world outraged him in general by giving him an exterior totally

unsuitable for the position he was destined to hold in it, it was always outraging and humiliating him by requiring him to do what he never should be required to do.

The particular errand upon which he was now engaged was an example. His regiment had reached the broad river over which Pierre and his fellow-soldiers had crossed the evening before and this morning at daybreak he had been ordered to reconnoitre the tributary beside which they were now standing. To carry out this hazardous undertaking he had been given the totally inadequate force of twenty-four men and Ober-Leutnant Gruben knew that he was given such a command merely to humiliate him.

And now here was this clown of a Frenchman towering over him like a swaying jack-in-the-box and demanding, according to the rules of war, at least one of his men to take him back as prisoner.

'What are you doing here?' demanded the lieutenant.

Pierre looked down at him uncomprehendingly.

'What are you doing here?' repeated the lieutenant with a shout. The fool didn't know his own language.

'Que—fais—fous—izhi?' thundered the Prussian.

At last Pierre realized he was talking French. It was the first time he had ever heard a foreigner speak his language. He had no idea of the extraordinary ways in which it could be perverted—incorrect genders, mispronunciations, unheard-of expressions, and to all this Leutnant Gruben added a high-pitched voice, a clipped pedantic expression and his native gutturals. The imp within the Frenchman at this desperate moment in his career rose irrepressibly and Pierre struggled to suppress his customary chuckling.

'What's—your—name? Where's—your—regiment? What—alone—are—you—doing—here? Are you a deserter? Where your regiment did you leave?'

Leutnant Gruben spat out these questions, highly gratified to find his French coming to his lips so readily, completely unaware of the struggle for self-ossession going on within his prisoner.

Then at last the Frenchman's sense of the ridiculous mastered him. Leutnant Gruben looked up sharply, horrified. The man was laughing at him, laughing at him, an officer of the Prussian Army!

He took a pace back and glared at him for some silent pregnant seconds. He was right. His senses had not deceived him. This miserable lanky Frenchman with his comedian's outfit was laughing at him.

'Go—up—there,' he shouted at last and pointed to a path leading into the forest. 'Go—get—on.'

Pierre understood what he meant by his gestures, not from his words. He needed no second bidding. He walked off in the direction the Prussian indicated, happy to think that the encounter was at an end.

Hardly had he taken six paces when Gruben raised his revolver sharply and shot him square in the back.

Presumably the bullet had hit a vital spot—it could hardly have done otherwise at such close range, for Pierre fell at once, but he was not dead.

He turned and with a struggle managed to prop himself up into a sitting position supported by his elbows. His eyes sought and found those of his assailant.

In them perhaps Leutnant Gruben read the dying Frenchman's thoughts—astonishment, incredulity, protest, reproach. His anger flamed up refortified. He stalked up to the prostrate Frenchman and stood over him.

'Not going to waste another bullet over you,' he screamed angrily, but he said this more for the benefit of his men than for Pierre.

He drew back his right hand, which clenched the smoking pistol, as if about to smash it into the Frenchman's face, but immediate events proved there was no need for this final contribution to the German war-effort.

Pierre's eyes slowly closed. His elbows, which had kept his body up, suddenly gave and his head fell back, striking the ground behind with a thud.

For the privilege of his five-minute interview with this select ambassador of the *Herrenvolk*, the simple inoffensive peasant had paid with his life.

## 5

## TWO BIRTHS

THOUGH THE WAR had cost Anne Deschamps so much she was not invited to take part in those great and glorious celebrations at Versailles which marked its conclusion and the birth of the German Empire.

For that matter none of the other many thousands of disconsolate widows and mothers and orphans were invited—neither French nor

German—and indeed had they been there they must have marred the glorious pageantry of the day.

Moreover, Anne was too much engrossed in her own concerns to know much about what was happening elsewhere. Two months after she had received the news that Pierre was not only missing but was now certainly dead, she gave birth to his son, Charles.

No one would have been surprised if the child, coming into a home where the shadow of death still cast a heavy gloom, had turned out to be unhappy and wretched, as Anne herself had been from the moment she had heard the bugle recalling her husband to the colours.

But instead he was as bright and cheerful as any young man born in the neighbourhood within living memory. Sadly Anne noticed that he smiled within a fortnight of his birth—only on one side it is true, but incontestably a smile—and then the child supplied her with an infallible balm to soothe her sense of loss—he was the reincarnation of his father. Pierre lived again in him.

True, nobody saw this as clearly as Anne did. In truth he was very much more like her than his father. He had the same analytical eyes, the same firm mouth, the same delicate features and the same thoughtful brow. There was little to recall the more open features and the naïve, ingenuous expression of Pierre, but in spite of this Anne saw in him the living image of her dead husband and recalled him more easily by a glance at this happy, prattling, battling infant than by looking at the one photograph which remained of him.

Not only did he give Anne comfort in her sorrow, he presented her with a reason to go on with the struggle to live—a reason for which she was in desperate need. She would hand over the farm intact to him. Every field, every copse, every shed which belonged to it when Pierre marched away should be his son's when he was of age to take possession. Cost what it might, his father's inheritance should be his.

The price Anne paid to achieve this life's ambition was high—long hours of work, from the rising of the sun to its going down, and then hours of sewing and housework in the evenings, short commons when money for the corn and cattle did not come in when it should. The farm was one of the biggest and richest in the district. None of them was large compared with English farms and Anne's was under fifty acres, but most of it was together, a compact self-contained territory, little of it wasted by easements across it allowing neighbouring farmers access to fields isolated amongst the meadows of others. It was impossible for Anne to cultivate all this



land herself and she had to call in neighbours to plough, sow and reap for her at a heavy cost in hard cash, and what was worse in providing them with meals during the day. Moreover, having their own land they came not when Anne wanted them but when they had finished their own work and had a day or so to spare for her. Anne knew not only what needed doing on the farm but the most propitious moment for it to be done. It was rarely that she could get anyone to do the work at that favourable moment, and it caused her a great deal of distress to see the rules of husbandry so flagrantly flouted. But in spite of this her crops on the whole were not much the less for these infractions. They were usually as good as the average and often better; for one thing she could bring herself to spend precious francs on artificial manures which few of her neighbours could, and for another her seed, going in late, was never endangered by the spring frosts which more than once laid a heavy toll on the potatoes, maize and vegetables sown too early.

What gave her much greater anxiety than the farm with its daily round was the fear lest Charles should be seduced for the church. The priest at La Chataignerie had a reputation for that and so Anne kept the boy from his school and attended church with him only on All Saints' Day and Good Friday.

She herself taught Charles to read, or rather it would be truer to say he insisted upon his mother teaching him. For very early on he guessed that something vitally important and necessary for him to know was hidden in these printed signs he saw about on walls and in the books to which people turned for guidance—even at La Chataignerie. For some weeks he struggled, as do all children, with the task of deciphering the different letters and stuttering through the sounds they made when joined together. He sat alone for hours copying letters and words for himself upon a slate. Then to Anne's amazement the day came, unexpectedly as a butterfly in early summer, when at a bound he began to read almost as fluently as herself.

He turned to his father's three-volumed library and devoured it hungrily. *Here One Learns All* was always in his hands. Odds and ends of it which he read out or repeated later brought back to Anne a side of his father which she had forgotten—the capitals of the world, the longest rivers, the highest mountains, the strange facts, the apocryphal stories of the great, including the rebellious horses at Queen Victoria's coronation.

Pierre's tiny library did not content his son for long. He went round to other houses hungrily, searching for new books to read,

as other children his own age, none too well-fed, edged into a neighbour's in the hope of being given a crust of bread.

At about this time Monsieur Gasnier-Revellon settled in Merville-les-Fées, a hamlet two or three kilometres away. On the edge of the village the Marquis de Sauterne a hundred years before had built a country-house for one of his sons. It was a magnificent incongruous structure standing two stories high with gabled roofs and green shutters, forming a striking contrast to the low one-storied dwellings of the peasants and farmers around it.

The house had long passed out of the hands of the Sauterne family and was now taken by Monsieur Gasnier-Revellon. He was a retired judge. Like so many Frenchmen who succeed in a commercial or professional career in the cities, he always cherished the hope of settling down upon an estate in the country at the end of his days.

Monsieur Gasnier-Revellon was as great a contrast to his neighbours as was his house to theirs. Erect, of medium height, ruddy, jovial, clad in shooting suits of excellent green or brown corduroy, unhurried and talkative, whilst the peasants, for the most part, long before they reached his age were thin, muscular, bent from the hips up, with their eyes ever on the ground of which they were in truth as much a part as the houses and barns built into it.

Shortly after his eleventh birthday Charles came home in great excitement. Monsieur Gasnier-Revellon had promised him a dictionary in return for a week's work in his garden. More, he had taken him into his house and shown him his books—vast shelves full of books.

'You could never read them all—never,' cried Charles.

At the end of the week he returned home with the dictionary. Anne looked at it distrustfully. She knew little of books. Those she had known to come under their spell had wasted as much time over them as others wasted in an *estaminet* over glasses of beer.

'But it isn't reading,' said Anne, 'it's just words.'

Charles tried to explain how valuable it was. Anne remained unconvinced. His enthusiasm was real, she saw, as she stood over him looking at him as he turned from word to word. But why you needed a book to tell you what a word meant she was quite unable to understand. She suspected that the boy had been cheated.

He began to bring home books from the Gasnier-Revellon library. They were on a great variety of subjects but Anne noted with some relief that many were on agriculture.

One day Gasnier-Revellon himself walked into the house. He

often did so, entering unannounced as an English squire would walk into the house of one of his farm labourers.

'I've come to try your cider, Madame Deschamps,' he said boisterously. He tried everybody's cider, and then sent along a bottle of table wine to make up for his depredations.

'What are you going to do with that boy of yours?' he demanded after half-emptying the glass in one draught.

Anne looked at him—all her hostility suddenly aroused. She saw in this jovial man from the town a greater potential enemy than the parish priest.

'You should make him a lawyer,' he said.

'This is his farm,' said Anne.

'Make him a lawyer,' said Gasnier-Revellon, 'he'll be able to buy ten farms like this before he's forty. What about it, Charles, how'd you like to be a lawyer?'

'No,' said Charles stubbornly.

'No,' he kept saying as Gasnier-Revellon went on developing the possibilities of a legal career. He could not put into words why he was refusing. It may be that he felt already that a lawyer in a great city is only one of many, however eminent and however successful, whilst he down upon his farm would be its king.

'Would you like to be a lawyer—or something like that?' Anne asked him later in the evening, waiting for his answer with bated breath.

'No,' was the short but comforting reply. The boy did not bother to raise his eyes from his book.

## 6

## MURDER WILL OUT

**B**UT ANNE HAD not done with Monsieur Gasnier-Revellon. Charles came home late one evening. He stood looking at her angrily.

'You said my father was killed,' he burst out suddenly. 'He was murdered. The Germans murdered him. Monsieur Gasnier-Revellon says so.'

'War is murder—of a sort,' said Anne.

She had rarely spoken to him of his father. For one thing even now she could not speak of Pierre without fear of breaking down.

For another she wanted to do nothing that would poison Charles's mind against the Germans. She said nothing about Alsace and Lorraine, nothing about the shrouded statues in the Place de la Concorde. Earliest amongst the pathetic army of the appeasers, she thought that if her country accepted its defeat with resignation, the Teuton blood-lust would be satisfied.

"They picked a quarrel with us because they knew they were ready and we weren't. They stole our land."

"They didn't steal *our* land," said Anne weakly.

"No, because it wasn't in Alsace or Lorraine. But if it was they would have."

The boy's eyes shone fiercely as he thought that he might have been driven out of his heritage.

"And if it wasn't for England and Russia they would have attacked us again long before now," he continued. "Monsieur Gasnier-Revelon says so. They didn't take all of Lorraine. But they were coming back for it. . . . They're thieves, murderers, liars. . . . Monsieur Gasnier-Revelon says so. He says before I'm twenty-five they'll force us to quarrel again."

Like a knell Anne heard again the distant bugle.

"I hope they do. I'll kill them. They killed my father. . . ."

## 7

## LOVE AND MONSIEUR COTILLON

FELIX COTILLON WAS the freeholder of a tiny farm some three kilometres from La Chataignerie. Now—1894—he was approaching fifty. Twenty-four years before he had gone off from Chevanne-le-Vert with the men of La Chataignerie upon the same errand as that from which Pierre Deschamps never returned. He remembered still Anne running out of the darkness to bid a last farewell to her husband.

The first thing you noticed about Felix, often the only thing, was his height, or rather absence of height. He had hopes of escaping the army because he was too short. Before undergoing his medical examination he had practised compression. Though he might not be able to subtract a cubit from his stature by taking thought he hoped to be able to compress himself the two or three centimetres which would be just sufficient to secure exemption.

Upon the day of the examination Felix compressed himself as never before. His hair, anointed with oil for the first time and with the same solemn purpose in view, saved him one centimetre and with this, added to his compression, he could reasonably look forward to escaping the army by about a short inch.

Unfortunately, the medical officer—a disillusioned-looking man with clouded eyes and a pessimistic, drooping moustache—was lacking in any sense of sportsmanship. When the process of compression was at its tensest and Felix stood innocent-eyed, respectful and naked against the height meter, the medical officer buried his thumb without warning in the recruit's drum-taut middle, causing him to spring upward with a jerk, hitting the measuring board above his head with a sharp rap, and so butting his way into both the army and the Franco-Prussian war.

Now at fifty, in his patched corduroys and wooden sabots, his stocky obstinate figure looked like an old oak and his wrinkled bright-coloured face like an apple kept until June. But in these days he went about with a troubled, preoccupied air. Love affairs were upsetting his peace of mind, and these tender passions brought him no enjoyment to compensate him for the worry they gave him. They were not his own love affairs but the love affairs of his children, and he would gladly have disclaimed anything to do with them had he been able to.

His wife had died a few years before just as the three children were approaching this critical age. Elodie, the eldest, was now twenty-four. Germain, the second, was twenty-one, and Gilberte eighteen.

Up to the late age of twenty-four Elodie had never attracted the attentions of any of the youth of the neighbourhood, though she was zealous in her attendance at the local fêtes and dances, though she was as competent a housewife as could be found and though she was now announcing frequently that nothing would induce her to marry. She was becoming sharp-tongued and bitter and frequently had words with Gilberte and her father, who knew that underneath it all was her resentment against him for refusing to part with some of his fields as a dowry to any likely suitor.

Felix's farm was a tiny affair and if he were to part with some of it for dowries for his two daughters there would be little of it left for himself. But indeed, even if his farm had been as big as a *département*, he would not have parted with a single meadow. 'What I have I hold' put into elegant Latin would have been the only possible motto for Felix if, like his wealthier brother-freeholders, it had occurred to him to devise a coat of arms.

On an evening in late September when the sun had filled the western sky with a blaze of golden splendour and the harvest moon, pale and diffident, was waiting in the eastern wings, a dog-cart drove up to the Cotillon farm and from it descended two young men—one, Sebastien Bertrand, tall and already stout, in the tight-fitting uniform of the gendarmes, the other, even taller and slimmer and handsomer, Charles Deschamps.

Under his arm Sebastien carried a musical instrument and it was he who came up to Monsieur Cotillon and explained the object of the mission.

He had found the instrument in the loft at his parents' house in La Chataignerie. Naturally, having found it, he could not leave it about in idleness. He must learn to play it. He felt that was the least he could do for it. Careful examination had established that the instrument was a bassoon. He himself would not have chosen a bassoon. A cornet or a clarinet was more in his line but he had to take what came to hand. Good, honest, thrifty peasant that he was, Monsieur Cotillon understood these reasons perfectly. These young gentlemen, then, had come to exercise a very praiseworthy musical bent.

'Germain,' said Sebastien, 'you know——'

Monsieur Cotillon nodded sagely.

Germain was just back from Paris where an uncle in the tailoring trade had taken him as an apprentice. He came up just as Monsieur Cotillon was looking round for him. He was shorter than his two sisters, shorter even than Monsieur Cotillon himself, despite his efforts to reduce his stature at a critical phase of his physical development. His hands and feet, too, were smaller than his sisters'. Neither of them could wear his gloves or shoes. Yet small as they were, both hands and feet were amongst the most skilful ever to be found anywhere in La Creuse.

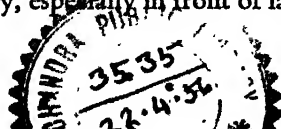
Paris had turned him into a first-class tailor and had taught him dances which no one round had seen before. He was, besides, an excellent musician. Everybody wanted him and his violin and clarinet at their weddings. Hence the Bertrand-Deschamps expedition to the Cotillon farm.

'You play the cornet, the clarinet and the good God knows what-not,' explained Sebastien. 'I thought you'd be able to play this.'

'Sebastien wants to play it himself,' explained Charles Deschamps.

'Can't you play it at all?' demanded Monsieur Cotillon.

'Oh, I can play it all right,' said Sebastien, who never willingly admitted an incapacity, especially in front of ladies—for Elodie and



Gilberte had now joined the party. 'I can play it all right but I don't know any tunes.'

Germain placed the bassoon to his lips and a dozen notes darted from it like imprisoned elves making good their escape.

'Not bad,' commented Germain critically. 'Where did you find it?'

'Under some rubbish up in the attic,' answered Sebastien. 'If you could just give me the idea——'

He himself had so far failed to extract a single note.

In proof of their assertion that they had come for no other purpose than to practise the art of music, Messieurs Bertrand and Deschamps continued to devote all their attention to the bassoon and Germain, taking but the barest notice of Elodie and Gilberte, though in appearance they were as attractive and as shapely young women (despite their lack of inches) as were to be found for miles around.

Sebastien's efforts to master the bassoon began almost at once. Germain, this first evening, succeeded in showing him how it was possible to extract sounds from the instrument and then he put down on paper a short run of notes for Sebastien to practise, showing him, too, how they would sound when properly played.

'Da da-da da da, da-da da-da da da.'

Painstakingly Sebastien set to work. He ignored the shouts of laughter which greeted his efforts. He defied the threat of a broken blood-vessel when, blowing into the instrument with all his force, not a sound would emerge. But when at last, near midnight, he set down the bassoon and announced that he would leave it there till next evening, the Cotillon family realized that Sebastien and his bassoon were no laughing matter. Sebastien meant to come again and again and again until he could play the bassoon to his satisfaction, which might be years hence.

Regularly evening after evening the two young men came, and regularly the farm echoed with Sebastien's forays.

'The tone of the bassoon,' says one writer, 'is throughout capable of great variety and has three distinct characteristics pervading different registers; the lowest octave, full, rich and weighty with medium blowing, becomes raucous and strident with greater force; the middle register is mellow, with a tendency towards a hollow tone when used very softly; the upper tone resembles a pure high tenor or alto voice. Such possibilities have attracted modern composers, and the bassoon has become one of the most expressive voices in the orchestra, capable alike of pastoral gaiety, rollicking

humour and deepest tragedy. In the hands of a first-rate performer it has an easy compass. The tenor clef is used for bassoon music when the higher registers are employed for any length of time but the bass clef suffices for all ordinary work.'

For the unfortunate Cotillons Sebastien never wasted his time on medium blowing. The full, rich weight of the lowest octave was not to his liking. Always he applied the greater force, becoming raucous and strident, and they had little of the promised pastoral gaiety and none of the rollicking humour. Sebastien was always for deepest tragedy.

Monsieur Cotillon guessed almost as soon as did Elodie that there was more in these meetings than music. In breathing spaces between his frontal attack upon the bassoon, Sebastien began to make sly flank advances upon Elodie.

Up to now Elodie felt aggrieved that Destiny had sent her no suitor. She was no more content when at this late hour it sent Sebastien. The Bertrands had many excellent qualities—good humour, industry, imperturbability and tenacity; but they had serious faults too—they were boastful, loquacious, and always tending from being stout to become stouter. The worthy gendarme Sebastien Bertrand had all the family faults and all the family qualities, especially tenacity. It was that which Elodie feared. She stung him with her tongue. He joined in the laughter her taunts raised, but Elodie had a feeling within her that he would go on and on and one day he would carry her off through sheer dogged persistence.

The regular attendance of Charles Deschamps was a greater puzzle. He had no bassoon to screen his motives and Monsieur Cotillon felt certain that he did not turn out his dog-cart night after night with the altruistic aim of saving the chubby Sebastien's legs. At first he thought that perhaps he, too, was a suitor for Elodie. They were of an age and Elodie made no secret of her appreciation of the worth of this excellent young man.

Charles Deschamps, now arrived at man's estate, had the looks and bearing of a prince. His alert blue eyes and smiling features pleased everybody. He could turn his hand to anything. He could learn a trade from a book. He had built the dog-cart in which he and Sebastien came and had made the harness for Coquette, the gentle little mare which drew it. He had introduced new breeds of cattle, pigs and poultry which gave a better return than the existing types common in the district up till now, and with the skilful use of fertilizers was getting in unprecedented yields from his



fields. With it all he was modest and pleasant and enjoyed an evening at a fête or a dance as much as anyone. What was more, he would even dance with girls whose parents had no fields and no hopes of a dowry. Usually young men with property reserved themselves for girls who had property too.

Gradually the truth dawned upon Monsieur Cotillon's slow intelligence. Charles Deschamps was in love with Gilberte and, what was more, he intended to marry her. An astounding discovery but true. Monsieur Cotillon was amazed that this young man, whose reputation for good judgment in livestock was famous for miles round, should have chosen Gilberte.

And then he began to look at Gilberte in a new way—through the eyes of Charles Deschamps. Gilberte, though small, as were all the Cotillons, was perfect in face and figure—she had regular features, a gentle expression, a peach-like complexion—all summed up in the expression of the peasants, 'She looked like a little Jesus.' Like all the Cotillon women (but not the Cotillon men) she could speak her mind with firmness and candour when she felt so inclined, but generally she was kind and considerate and her voice was quiet and pleasing.

The man to whom she gave her heart would have her passionate and unswerving loyalty all her days and a trustee of his goods and property who would account for his last sou. Add to this the promise of first-rate cooking and speed and skill in getting through the housework so that she could be as long as possible in the fields and you may well ask—how many meadows would you give for all this?

Monsieur Cotillon for his part would have given exactly none. Good looks, a good complexion, never lasted. A meadow was always a meadow. As for the rest; love, loyalty, and good cooking, that was what you expected from a woman—meadows or no meadows. But dimly he began to see how Charles Deschamps looked at it.

He had got into the habit of talking over his troubles with Charles, who had such a sage old head on his young shoulders. Heaven knew he had enough.

Germain was the worst—but of that more anon.

Elodie, now that she too had realized that Charles Deschamps came here for Gilberte and not for her, was getting intolerable. Her sharp tongue and bad temper caused domestic upsets every day. Then to crown all—Sebastien's bassoon.

'Why in the name of thunder,' demanded Monsieur Cotillon of

Charles, 'does he want to play a bassoon? Isn't a fiddle bad enough?'

'When one looks for one's musical instrument in the attic one has to take what one finds,' Charles reminded him.

'I can't go on like this,' said Felix.

For the last fortnight Sebastien had played along the single line of notes Germain had written for him, making no apparent progress, and wherever Felix went of an evening after Sebastien's arrival the bassoon pursued him.

'Leave him alone,' said Charles, 'the gendarmes don't want any fields and if he marries Elodie the bassoon will go with him.'

Even Gilberte and Charles Deschamps gave him some anxiety.

'*Oui . . . oui . . . oui*,' he grumbled, '*mais . . . mais . . .*'

Charles knew by this time that these internal grumbings were often the prelude to an outburst.

'Well?' he asked.

'You and Gilberte,' exclaimed Monsieur Cotillon. 'Anne won't like it.'

'My mother isn't going to marry her,' said Charles, just as though he was an Englishman instead of a sensible young French peasant.

'I've got no fields, you know,' Monsieur Cotillon warned him.

'I don't want your fields,' answered Charles. 'I want Gilberte.'

'My fields are as good as anyone else's,' retorted Monsieur Felix, vexed that his beloved meadows should be so lightly abandoned.

'What good would they be to me?' asked Charles Deschamps. 'I should take an hour getting to them from our place.'

'*Oui . . . oui . . .*' agreed Monsieur Cotillon sagaciously, nodding his head. He hadn't thought of that. It was a point on which they could come to a truce.

Monsieur Cotillon ruminated. He demanded suddenly:

'Then are you going to marry Gilberte?'

'Yes,' said Charles Deschamps.

Monsieur Cotillon subsided into an awed silence. What a to-do the marriage would cause! How mad would be the wives of the surrounding farms with elegant daughters and dowries of barns and fields and meadows enough to double the Deschamps farm! How overjoyed would be the others—to think that this Charles Deschamps was making such a fool of himself, after all his pretensions to wisdom and judgment, by marrying a girl who wouldn't bring him a pigsty.

That same night the bassoon ceased its troubling later than usual.

Eventually the imperturbable Sebastien came out into the yard where Gilberte and Charles were awaiting him with Coquette already harnessed.

He had just come from making his first set proposal to Elodie. They had been alone in the living-room and, seeing his chance, Sebastien had put down the bassoon in the middle of a note.

'Elodie,' he said, 'suppose we got married——'

'What,' exclaimed Elodie. 'You may be sure . . .'

'If you married me,' went on Sebastien, standing before her like a humble penitent confessing himself, 'I'd get on well in the *gendarmerie*. We'd have our little house and garden, and at fifty I'd retire as clerk of a court somewhere . . .'

'You may be sure . . .' mocked Elodie.

'Only,' he went on with simple and humble dignity, 'I'm not a scholar like you, Elodie. I'll have to study to get through the exams to become a sergeant in the *gendarmerie*. You'd be able to help me. You were in my class at school, you remember, though I was two years older than you and I was pretty good. But you always did your dictation without any mistakes and you always got your arithmetic right. If you would help me I'd work in the evenings and pass the examinations . . .'

'You may be sure . . .' repeated Elodie:

'And then,' pursued the indefatigable Sebastien, 'you'd have a lady's life. You'd just keep our house nice. You wouldn't have to work in the fields.'

'I'm not going to marry you,' said Elodie. 'You need not worry . . .'

She flung out of the room and left him standing there with his bassoon.

'I asked her to-night—you know,' said Sebastien to Charles Deschamps in the darkness as they rode back. Charles caught the purposeful glint in his companion's eye.

'What did she say?' he asked.

'She said "No" all right,' answered Sebastien with a chuckle.

He added after a moment's silence, 'She can say "No" fifty times. That won't matter so long as she says "Yes" once.'

There was silence as Coquette rattled along a level stretch of road. When at a hill she slowed to a walk Sebastien asked, 'You and Gilberte—all right, eh?'

Charles nodded.

Sebastien did not envy him his facile success. His siege of Elodie might be long and rigorous but in the end he felt sure she would

strike her flag and, when she did, her surrender would be all the sweeter.

## 8

## SACRED AND PROFANE LOVE

GERMAIN HAD BEEN sent to Paris to forget.

In front of him at school had sat Alice Dupont. Her thick ringlets of dark chestnut hair fell over her delicate shoulders and often rested on Germain's desk. Sometimes he caught a glimpse of her regular profile with its finely finished little nose. Her skin was white and, like a flame in a vase of alabaster, a beautiful—terrifyingly beautiful—glow of warm colour suffused her cheeks.

One day Alice had stood between Germain and other boys who were tormenting him because of his lack of inches and his tiny girlish hands and feet. They had loved each other from that moment and when they left school Germain was always going off to Hilaire-les-Vignes where Alice lived on her parents' farm. Much less frequently Alice came up to the Cotillons'.

Madame Cotillon—she was then alive—was horrified at the prospect of Germain marrying Alice. Alice's beautiful colour had no more charm for her than has a red sky in the morning for an experienced sailor. Alice was the last of three children. Her two brothers Emile and Jean had died of tuberculosis at the ages of seventeen and eighteen. Madame Cotillon knew that Alice would go the same way but was haunted with the possibility that she might live long enough to marry Germain and leave him with children carrying with them the Dupont heritage of disease and death.

She battled night and day to persuade Germain to give up Alice. In vain.

'Why should she have consumption just because her brothers had it?' he demanded obstinately.

'Because she's been brought up in the same way as her prothners, answered Madame Cotillon fiercely. 'Half-starved. Never enough to eat. No eggs. No butter. That's why.'

The Duponts, as everyone said, sold every egg and every pound of butter they could. They said of Monsieur Dupont's grandfather that he was the celebrity who had taught his donkey to work more and more for less and less food until at last he was able to

reduce the animal's fodder to exactly nothing per day. Alas, just when this devoutly-wished consummation had been achieved the ass died. However this may be, certain it is that all the Dupont children, despite their high colour and bright eyes, never looked as if they had enough to eat and never as if they were sufficiently clothed. Uncharitable neighbours said that rather than spend their sous on food and clothing the Duponts would bury their children first; in fact they had already buried their two sons and Alice, it seemed, would go the same way.

Père and Mère Dupont, to all outward seeming, were peasants like all the small proprietor farmers around them. In fact they were not. They were the fanatical high priests of the goddess Ceres. Their farm was her temple, her altars the Dupont fields and meadows. The Duponts ministered unto her every waking hour of their lives. You would see them going about the fields bent and silent, intent upon their devotions. Ceres demanded their all—their own lives, their children's. They yielded them up without a murmur of protest. Every sou they earned must be carefully saved to buy another meadow to the glory of their goddess. They had no money for Russia or Germany where so many of the peasants' savings went, never to return. All they earned was devoted to their divine mistress with a single-mindedness only rivalled by the city magnate in his worship of the great god Mammon.

And let this be said for the Duponts. Whereas Mammon will shut up his ministers and saints in unhealthy, ugly offices, denying them the bright sun and the fresh air and the refreshing rain, the goddess Ceres never confines her devotees to a cell. They share with her the glory of the changing pageant of the year as season succeeds to season. They, with her, feel part of the earth upon which they labour.

A visit of a brother-of Madame Cotillon's at this critical time offered a way of salvation. He was a tailor in Paris and saw at a glance how much skill and speed lay hidden in Germain's tiny hands and how exact and unerring were his bright blue eyes. He offered to take him back to Paris to teach him tailoring, and though Germain was loth to go, the whole-hearted insistence of every other member of the family was too much for him and off to Paris with l'oncle Zébéde he went.

But Germain did not forget. Rather did it make him all the more remember. The shy inexperienced country boy drew back from the noise and glare and garish display of the city as he would have shrunk from the advances of a loud-mouthed, painted strumpet.

And when now at last, his apprenticeship over, Germain was back again, he was hungrier than ever for Alice's embraces.

Madame Cotillon in the meantime had died, but Elodie had taken her place. She was as fierce and strident as her mother in denouncing his visits to the Duponts, and even Gilberte did her best to dissuade him, but with much more sympathy and understanding. In the thick of the storm Monsieur Cotillon stood in his family circle dumb and irresolute, urged this way and that by Elodie and Gilberte and not knowing what to do for the best.

Alice, said Elodie, was worse and everybody knew it because she only came out at the rarest intervals and never was seen at a fête.

And as against this there was a girl in a neighbouring town not twenty kilometres away whose father was dead and had left a splendid little tailoring business. Her mother was now on the lookout for an enterprising young man who would marry her daughter and take over the business as the dowry.

'I'm not an animal,' protested the outraged Germain, who had brought back some deplorable ideas of matrimony from Paris—almost English in their reckless romanticism—and off he went to his Alice.

Germain had come home at a very awkward turn in the Dupont fortunes. He came home in the July preceding the battle of the bassoon. Alice had passed a wretched winter. She had been plagued with a cough all through it and several times she was so weak that she could not get up. With better weather she had improved beyond belief. She was up and about and as bright and optimistic as ever. But this improvement was punctuated with violent bouts of weakness. She would suddenly collapse wherever she happened to be. Once Monsieur and Madame Dupont, coming back from the fields, found her almost choked to death under the table.

This meant that Madame Dupont must keep to the house. She could never leave Alice, for it would never do for Germain to see her in the middle of one of these attacks. Germain was coming in now at all times. No one ever quite knew when he might arrive, and though the potatoes were crying out to be earthed up, it was better to leave them than for Germain to walk in one afternoon and find Alice, as they had already found her, unconscious beneath the table.

Père and Mère Dupont were quite sure that the best thing for Alice would be for her to get married as soon as possible. She and Germain would open a nice little tailoring business in a town nearby—La Châtre, Aigurande or perhaps Guéret—where Alice would have the comfort of a town house and a doctor always handy

if anything happened. And if anything did happen nobody would have been more surprised than they. Following the telegram saying that Alice was very ill they would go off at once—or at any rate on the next Sunday—to see what was the matter, and nobody would be more astonished or distressed than they to find Alice in the last stages of tuberculosis.

In their anxiety to get Alice out of the way of their daily devotions, they did not stop to consider whether this their last child had a better chance of survival as a maid than in assuming the more exacting rôle of wife and possibly mother. Nor did they ask where the money was coming from which would set up the happy couple in the nice little business. Certainly it would not come from them. Equally certainly it would not come from Monsieur Cotillon.

Meanwhile Père Dupont went off to his fields alone, Madame Dupont watching him hungrily from the door. For the ploughing they used their donkey and borrowed a neighbour's cows, but for lighter work they had a contraption of ropes and thongs which Madame Dupont used to bind round her waist and shoulders to pull implements such as a harrow whilst Monsieur Dupont pushed from behind. This was how they earthed up the potatoes, and at the thought of them Madame Dupont's bosom ached for the embrace of her harness as another woman's might to suckle a child.

As for Père Dupont, working alone was little to his liking. He had always had Madame Dupont with him, working through the long days in a silence of profound intimacy never broken by her and only by him at long intervals to mutter a terse comment upon the state of the crops or the outlook of the weather.

For weeks they were lucky. Whenever Germain called he found Alice up and active—doing things in the house and giving the lie to the allegations which Elodie and Gilberte and his father and many of his friends were making that Alice was far advanced in consumption. Occasionally there was a delay in her appearance when he called. But Madame Dupont always explained this by saying that Alice was changing and rallied him for coming at such a time. Sure enough after a wait Alice would appear radiant as ever and as lively as could be wished.

But one unhappy day just as Germain's head appeared over the hatch of the door and just as Alice, seeing him, gave her customary happy cry of recognition and started to run to him, she suddenly fell heavily on the stone slabs paving the living-room floor. Germain picked her up, and he and Madame Dupont carried her to her bed. All that night Germain watched beside her as she lay almost

unconscious and all the time gasping for breath. He was terrified. He realized now how true it was that Alice was so near death. The Duponts made no more pretences. They knew the game was up.

Alice died early one morning a little later, her hands feeling out for Germain's, who had loved her so faithfully, and with his name on her lips, scarcely audible, only recognizable because her parents had heard her pronounce it so often. Germain was not there. Alice had brightened up a good deal the night before, and Germain, worn out with four days' watching beside the bed, had been persuaded to go home for the night.

When he came back he found the house shrouded from the bright sun outside. In her little room off the main living-room Alice was lying in her white confirmation robe, her regular features, framed by the heavy chestnut of her hair, peacefully composed as if in a deep sleep. Her blue eyes were closed and the bright glow of her cheeks which had so terrified Germain's mother had faded for ever. Germain wept unrestrainedly. He and Monsieur and Madame Dupont stood at the bedside watching with the same expression of dumb stupefaction as that worn perhaps by the dwarfs gazing upon Snow White.

Whatever meannesses they had been guilty of in life, the Duponts spared their children nothing in death. Alice, like her brothers, was given a first-class funeral. That is to say, the priest, instead of coming half a kilometre from the church as he did for second-class funerals, or waiting in the church as he did for third-class, came out a whole kilometre to meet the cortège. And when the coffin was reverently taken into the church he and the sacristan kept up a doleful exchange of plain-song for three-quarters of an hour instead of the half-hour and quarter of an hour of the second- and third-class burials.

Then from the church they went the two or three hundred yards to the cemetery. There the Duponts had a family vault with a tiny chapel, brick-walled with slate above. The two wrought-iron gates at the entrance were open and vases of fresh flowers had been arranged on the narrow shelves around. The limestone slab forming the floor of the chapel and the roof of the vault had been drawn aside, and down below could be seen on the shelves the coffins of Alice's two brothers, Jean and Emile, and below them those of Monsieur Dupont's parents. Alice was carefully stowed away on a shelf above Emile, and then only two places remained—for Monsieur and Madame Dupont. That was where they would rest when their goddess taskmistress at last released her faithful servants and let them depart in peace.



After the funeral mourners and friends went to the Café de Paris in La Chataignerie for the funeral dinner. Louis Lehideux who kept it now did a very nice line in funeral dinners and he maintained his reputation to the full in the repast staged to follow the interment of the Duponts' last child.

Monsieur and Madame Dupont ate unsmilingly, but with resignation and appetite.

'When one has lost three,' said a neighbour on Germain's right, who alone of all the company was unable to do justice to the repast, 'one gets used to it.'

Monsieur and Madame Dupont walked back alone in the late afternoon to their farm. People keeping out of sight in their houses or behind hedges watched them pass.

'If they had sold less of their butter or their eggs . . .' they muttered to themselves.

But no regrets like these tortured the breasts of the bereaved pair. They thought of the morrow. To-morrow they would be free. At dawn they would feed the pigs and the fowls, and milk the cows. Then all day long they would be together out in their fields—together!—all day long!—in their fields!

## 9

## A MARRIAGE IS ARRANGED

UPON A SUNDAY in October, a day of blustering wind and downpours of rain followed by brilliant bursts of sunshine, a smartly turned-out chestnut mare harnessed to a dog-cart trotted into Boisselle-en-Nohantes. The attentive reader will have already recognized it as Charles Deschamps's and indeed he was again at the reins with Monsieur Cotillon beside him. Behind, seated on a small trunk, was Germain, looking if anything more disconsolate than he did at Alice's funeral.

The dog-cart came to a standstill outside a two-storied white-washed house opposite the church. In front was a broad pavement of cobbles. An aged vine wrestled its way up beside the front door in the middle and then spread two long tortuous arms right and left between the tops of the ground-floor windows and the sills of the first-floor windows. The whole exterior, so trim and well-kept, shone bright and clean in the sun after the rain and suggested an interior of comfort and ease.

The three men dismounted and looked about them for a moment like half-hearted conspirators. Monsieur Cotillon peered through the windows on the right of the door. Inside he saw a counter and, piled upon shelves behind, an assortment of suitings with a preponderance of serges in blue and black.

'This is it,' said Père Cotillon.

After another pause he led the others into the house, through the hall to the room with the counter and the shelves of cloth. As the door opened a bell fastened to it rang tinnily and hardly were all three inside the room when Madame Rocambert entered by another door followed by Euphemie, her daughter.

Madame Rocambert, though fundamentally human, had much in her appearance which recalled the frog—a frog poised to snap at a fly waltzing above its nose. Her head was thrown back on her shoulders with hardly any length of neck between. Her broad moist lips rarely met for any length of time and her skin was loose and fell over the bones of her jaws. Her big brown eyes bulged enormously, giving her an expression of consternation.

Euphemie was very obviously the daughter of her mother. She was now twenty. At fifty she too would recall the frog, her head would be thrown back from long custom, her skin would begin to hang down loosely, her eyes would bulge. But at twenty these things were only beginning to suggest themselves and there was much besides to charm—her girlish waist, for example, her white throat, and the firm soft contours outlined beneath her silk blouse, her wealth of black hair, her soft voice, her pleasing laugh. Indeed, though no suitor had asked for Euphemie's hand, many a young peasant back from his military service who had come to Monsieur Rocambert to be fitted with the black serge lounge suit which was to last him a lifetime of christenings, marriages, funerals, visits to doctor, priest, and lawyer, had looked at Euphemie standing behind the counter and sighed hopelessly. They knew Euphemie was not for them. Euphemie was a millionairess—in francs. And as she stood there so composed and so self-assured, so near and yet so far, it was just as if a placard had been hung round her neck with the words: 'Dowry 500,000 francs. Impecunious young men apply elsewhere.'

'Monsieur,' breathed Madame Rocambert. She launched at once into the story of her misfortunes, thinking her visitors had come to order suits.

'My husband died six months ago and since then I've had no one who can cut out,' she said.

She sighed heavily and her great eyes looked meaningly at the giant scissors, the tape measures, and the chalk ranged tidily at one end of the counter. Euphemie looked at them too. She sighed as noticeably if not so heavily.

Monsieur Cotillon leaned over the counter until his face was a foot from Madame Rocambert's, which looked fuller of consternation than ever.

'We haven't come for suits,' he whispered.

There was a moment of acute awkwardness. Monsieur Cotillon sought and found Madame Rocambert's eyes. He spoke to her through them. It was not the language of love but Madame Rocambert understood.

'My son here is a tailor,' his little green orbs said to Madame Rocambert's enormous brown ones. 'He'll marry your daughter and they can carry on the business together.'

There in a nutshell was the object of the expedition to Boiselle. Germain's skill was to be allied to Euphemie's dowry.

Madame Rocambert read the silent message.

She turned to Euphemie and said quietly, 'Show the young gentlemen the garden. I expect they would like to see it.'

With a reluctant shrug and then a pleasant smile Euphemie led them out through the hall passage to the garden at the back. There was a broad path up the middle lined with dahlias, which a month ago must have been a pageant of colour but now with the first chill breath of autumn had begun to blacken and wilt and to stain the path with their broad petals.

Charles Deschamps's keen eyes began to take in the garden at a glance. It lay on a slope facing south with its back to the north and east. The rich black soil was not local. At one time it must have been carted there. The paths at each side were lined with pear trees and now, in a short burst of sun, they stood out with a tragic vividness in their leaves of bronze, deep red, yellow and black.

Euphemie walked between them, quite at ease and self-possessed.

She had guessed their mission.

Which young man was to be hers? One was an inch, perhaps two inches, shorter than herself. The other was nearly head and shoulders taller. What a handsome young fellow, thought Euphemie! It might be he. At any rate until she was sure she could be excused if she gave her fancy free range.

'Have you done your military service?' asked Euphemie when the conversation palled.

There was an awkward pause.

'I was too short for the Army,' said Germain, looking straight in front of him.

'I expect you get a good crop of pears,' observed Charles Deschamps, gazing speculatively at the fruit trees.

'Hundreds,' said Euphemie—'I'll show you.'

She left them abruptly and ran into the house. In a moment she reappeared with a bunch of keys and led the way to a small out-house with roof and sides covered in a thick thatch.

She threw open the door, and there tier upon tier, carefully set out upon trays, was the year's crop of pears, each tray labelled with those names which are a feast in themselves—Beurré Hardy, Josephine de Malines, Bergamotte d'Esperen, Beurré Clairgeau.

'Butter' and 'Pear'! Who but a Frenchman would have thought of them as one?

And above the 'Beurrés' were racks of larger pears still, firm, shapely, smooth-skinned, labelled 'Cuisses des Dames'.

'Cuisses des Dames' indeed! Who but a Frenchman!

The two young men gazed at the display in silence. The air was thick as syrup with the breath of the heavy, ripening fruit, massed in such rich array. How Madame Rocambert and her daughter got through such a quantity was a puzzle. Euphemie pulled out one with a little cry of disgust—it was rotten—and threw it on to the garden bed. The two young men withdrew. Euphemie locked the door.

'Yes,' she said, 'we always get a good crop.'

Meanwhile the conference between Monsieur Cotillon and Madame Rocambert was progressing smoothly.

Monsieur Cotillon opened the proceedings by producing with befitting solemnity two documents—one on thick paper impressively stamped and beribboned which certified that Germain had gone through the proper stages of a tailoring apprenticeship: the other a letter from Germain's employer in Paris to say that he was highly satisfied with Germain's work and would give him employment whenever he liked to ask for it.

Madame Rocambert read both documents carefully. She put them down with a guarded '*Bien*'.

Then Monsieur Cotillon with a handsome gesture swept aside the documents—metaphorically speaking—not off the counter but out of the argument.

'But Madame, you needn't go by all this *paperasse*,' he said. 'I've seen his work. When you've seen his work you'll know what he's worth. Let him stay here a month—making suits for those who

want them. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. If after a month you don't think much of his work. . . .'

'*Bien*,' said Madame Rocambert.

'And then,' continued Monsieur Cotillon, dropping his voice and speaking more cautiously as befitted observations on the delicate subject of the heart, 'after a month if your daughter likes Germain and if Germain likes——'

'Euphemie,' said Madame Rocambert approvingly. After all, if the young man was to marry her daughter they had better get the matter on a family footing.

'Euphemie,' repeated Monsieur Cotillon. 'I don't know,' he continued, 'whether Euphemie has any interest in any other young men——'

'No, no,' Madame Rocambert assured him.

'Neither has Germain,' replied Monsieur Cotillon. 'I can tell you, Madame Rocambert, there isn't a young woman alive who's taken his fancy so——'

At the unspoken suggestion Madame Rocambert began to nod with unfeigned approval.

'Of course,' continued Monsieur Cotillon, 'I don't say he's an angel any more than any other young man.'

'But of course,' agreed Madame Rocambert whole-heartedly.

'As you know——'

'A young man,' conceded Madame Rocambert without reservation.

'In Paris,—all alone.'

'In Paris,—all alone.'

'But what would you?'

'Ah, monsieur, what would you?'

And thus, with winks and shrugs and many a roguish nod and chuckle, Madame Rocambert and Monsieur Cotillon brushed aside the hectic days they imagined Germain had spent in Paris. To do the youth justice he had lived a blameless life. On the few occasions when a mercenary lady had impeded his path he had been terrified and had hurried by her with a muttered '*Pas ce soir*'. The only excesses of which he had been guilty were to be found in his dreams of romantic adventures with Alice.

So it was arranged. Germain was to stay with the Rocamberts for a month, in which time they could form their own estimate of his worth as a tailor and as a husband for Euphemie. Euphemie seemed to understand the position at once without any explanation when she and her escort were called in from the garden. She no

longer stood between the two young men but on Germain's left, away from Charles Deschamps. She had already begun to call him 'Germain', pronouncing the name the first few times carefully and a little fearfully like someone uncertainly testing a stepping-stone in midstream. Germain kept calling her 'Mademoiselle', but when for a moment they were in a corner together she looked at him with an encouraging smile and said significantly, 'My name is Euphemie.' Germain thought her very delicious and charming.

When the sun was half an hour from the horizon Germain's trunk was taken out of the back of the dog-cart and Charles and Monsieur Cotillon got in. They drove away with Madame Rocambert, Germain and Euphemie at the door to wave them good-bye. Germain stood between the ladies and each had linked an arm in his. He stared after the retreating figures with the fixed gaze of a small dog whose former owners have handed him over to new masters, utterly unable to put into words his puzzlement and his pain.

## IO

### SEBASTIEN STAYS THE NIGHT

**T**HOUGH THE DAY at Boisselle-en-Nohantes had gone so successfully Monsieur Cotillon arrived home in no good humour. These matrimonial affairs which were none of his business had cost him another day. To Elodie's and Gilberte's shrill questions about Madame Rocambert and her daughter he made no reply. Jerking a lantern out of Gilberte's hands he went round his stables to see that all his animals were safely housed.

Charles Deschamps was no more helpful.

'Euphemie was charming,' he said. 'She wore a pink blouse.'

'And I suppose a *pantalon*,' snapped Elodie.

By now she had come to dislike Deschamps with great heartiness.

Sebastien saw in the absence of Germain in the coming month a means of intensifying his efforts to reduce Elodie. He had worked all day at the farm in Monsieur Cotillon's absence and everyone wondered what he would claim in return, for the Bertrands did not work even for potential fathers-in-law for nothing.

After supper he revealed his scheme.

'I don't go on duty to-morrow till noon,' he said. 'I'll finish off

the barn to-morrow morning. I can sleep in Germain's bed to-night, to save time in the morning.'

Before Monsieur Cotillon realized the impudence of the proposition he had meekly agreed to it.

'But you've no night-shirt,' objected Elodie sharply. Sebastien greeted the objection with a loud guffaw.

'No night-shirt,' he cried. He pulled at his shirt. 'You see,' he explained, delighted with his own wit, 'in the day-time it's a day shirt, in the night-time a night-shirt. But what I have got,' he said, 'is my night-cap,' and he produced his *bonnet de nuit* from his pocket, betraying the deep-seated character of his calculations. Straightway he put it on and began to prepare for bed.

Elodie and Gilberte, with cries of pretended horror, ran into their own room whilst Sebastien speedily got into Germain's bed, where he sat up beaming, delighted at the success of his plot.

The two girls came back. Charles called upon them to see what a seductive figure Sebastien looked in bed and wearing his night-cap.

After this, whenever Sebastien came, Gilberte made for his pockets. If she discovered in one of them his night-cap then Sébastien had come to stay. He still continued his labours with the bassoon. In addition to the tune Germain had written for him he could now play two or three scales. When in form he could slither along the length of them without a stop as a seaman swarms to the masthead. But usually he stuck half-way and kept the household in suspense as he struggled for the right fingering or until he dropped back and took another run from the beginning.

Failing to get rid of Sebastien by her own efforts Elodie began to upbraid her father.

'Why do you let him stay every night,' she demanded, 'annoying the neighbourhood with his bassoon?'

But Monsieur Cotillon was not the man to tell Sebastien to clear out.

At last Elodie hatched a plot with Gilberte to ask Charles to stay one night when it was reasonably certain that Sebastien would be intending to stay.

With astonishment Sebastien learnt of the trick, but quite unabashed he looked at Monsieur Cotillon's bed, which was double, and announced, 'That's all right. I'll sleep with you, Felix.'

'Oh, no,' said Monsieur Cotillon, very decided for once.

'Oh, no,' said Gilberte, shocked.

'What a suggestion!' cried Elodie.

But Sebastien did not go home. When nearly everyone else was

in bed he said tranquilly, 'Give me a lantern. I'll go to the barn.'

Out into the darkness he went with two blankets over his arm. His footsteps, passing across the yard to the barn, died away and the house fell into silence.

Then suddenly a deep mournful note, a solitary stray outcast, made itself heard. The bassoon! Under his blankets Sebastien had taken with him the bassoon.

The household lay in the darkness held in breathless suspense. Then suddenly came the volley of notes they had been waiting for. Sebastien once more was making his indefatigable way up the scales. With him willy-nilly he carried the Cotillon family.

In body they were comfortable and warm in their beds but in spirit Sebastien had them with him in the barn; or rather, so it felt to them, upon some desolate, windswept heath lined up for an attack. It was as if he were rallying them to storm an enemy stronghold and they had no choice but to obey. There they stood, the whole Cotillon family who had cast him out, shivering in their night-shirts awaiting Sebastien's next sally.

Always a long melancholy note shocked them into readiness for the renewal of the assault. Then onward—upward. Sometimes Sebastien led them up the hostile slope at a steady, deliberate pace but always came the moment when his broad fingers slipped and back they fell in disorderly rout. Sometimes he made a rush. With him rushed the wide-awake Cotillons. Grabbing, scrambling, thrusting, blindly they would almost achieve the crest when Sebastien's hurrying fingers would falter and, to the wail of wild disharmonies, back he came in confusion and with him his unhappy following.

Monsieur Cotillon sat up in bed.

'Good God,' he said. The girls from their bedroom screamed at the blasphemy and then began to titter subduedly.

Sebastien persevered. Monsieur Cotillon continued to sit up, angrily, bolt upright. 'To think that I should be plagued with this at my time of life,' he muttered.

There was a pause. Perhaps he would stop. Monsieur Cotillon knew in his heart that Sebastien would not stop. No Bertrand ever did stop, and Sebastien was the embodiment of everything the Bertrands were known to be. He would go on—on—on. Till dawn.

The pause ended with another burst.

'Good God,' repeated Monsieur Cotillon.

He lit a candle. Peeping through their door Elodie and Gilberte



saw him draw on trousers and boots and go out. In a few minutes he came back followed by a perfectly composed Sebastien, silent under Monsieur Cotillon's upbraidings.

'Making a row like that,' growled Monsieur Cotillon, 'enough to wake the dead.'

'You know——' said Sebastien good-temperedly, 'I find that if you put your little finger round the catch at the bottom——'

'Get in there,' muttered the defeated Monsieur Cotillon, indicating the side of his bed next the wall where no one had lain since Madame Cotillon had departed this life.

'You leave that damned thing about——' Monsieur Cotillon threatened.

'But it's interesting—music,' said Sebastien, dropping into a deep slumber with a contented yawn.

II

ELODIE STRIKES HER FLAG

THEN SEBASTIEN DISAPPEARED.

Than Sebastien no one more dependable, more solid, more of the earth earthy. Yet without a word of warning suddenly he had disappeared into thin air, ethereal as Titania, Queen of the Fairies.

Elodie noticed the disappearance from the first and adopted a careful air of indifference.

Charles Deschamps's failure to bring any news of Sebastien from the village did not increase Elodie's affection for him.

'Nothing's happened to him, I don't think,' he said, when Elodie did for once take the risk of asking him about Sebastien.

His last visit was on that evening when Charles Deschamps had taken Germain's bed and he had gone into the barn. The conclusion for Elodie was irresistible. This had been too much for even the long-suffering Sebastien. He was gone. He would not come back.

He had been the only suitor Elodie had had. If another did come into her life, no other man would have placed her on a pedestal and worshipped her as had Sebastien. To him she was not a fellow-mortal but a creature of a higher kind, like the colonist to the native or a man to his dog.

In his home she would have been queen. He knew that Elodie was much cleverer and a better manager than he. Now he was

gone. The bassoon lay silent upon the top of the wardrobe, and life stretched ahead for Elodie a desolate road.

Gilberte and Germain would marry but they would want their third of the farm when their father died. If she was still living here and took the house, that would be about a third in itself. With that she would have to struggle on to keep herself alive as best she could, perhaps dragging a goat along the hedgerows and half a dozen sheep to make up the lack of fields.

Pretending outwardly to be unconcerned, even unmindful of the unexpected turn in affairs, Elodie fumed inwardly like a volcano prior to eruption.

Monsieur Cotillon was destined to receive the full fury of the storm.

A week after Sebastien's disappearance he stood on a chair to reach down a tin of nails kept on the top of the wardrobe. In doing so he caught sight of the abandoned bassoon and thoughtfully lifted it down.

'I thought it was quiet,' he mused aloud, and then added with the astonishment of sudden revelation, 'Why—he's gone.'

'Gone!' exclaimed the pent-up Elodie. 'Of course he's gone.'

'But why?' demanded Monsieur Cotillon.

'Why?' echoed Elodie, white with fury. 'Why? Wouldn't you go if you'd been treated as you treated him?'

'Me?'

'Yes, you. You wouldn't let him stay. Kept him until midnight and then told him to go.'

'Kept him,' echoed the astonished Monsieur Cotillon.

'And then told him your precious Charles Deschamps was going to stay the night and he could go back in the dark. And then let him go into the barn for the night. What do you expect?'

Still standing on the chair, still holding the bassoon in his hands, Monsieur Cotillon was too taken aback to answer. Instead he did the worst possible thing. He placed the mouthpiece of the bassoon to his lips and out sprang two or three mocking notes.

Unable to control herself, Elodie ran at him and pulled the instrument out of his hands.

'At least you shan't do that,' she cried. 'You've done nothing but laugh at him since he's been coming here. He was worth a dozen of your Charles Deschamps. Now he's gone. . . .'

Monsieur Cotillon was gone too. He was afraid of Elodie as he had been afraid of her dear mamma. Lacking quick wits to answer these unjust charges—no one had mocked Sebastien as unsparingly

as Elodie herself had done—he resorted to time-honoured tactics. He marched stormily out of the house and sought consolation amongst his cows. Propped up against a manger he stormed—‘These damned *tracasseries*. . . . These damned plagues . . . these . . . these . . . women. . . .’

Exactly three weeks later Sebastien reappeared.

Outwardly smiling and imperturbable as ever, inwardly consumed with apprehension, Sebastien stopped at the gate of Monsieur Cotillon’s farm to take in the situation.

There was Elodie a hundred yards away in the yard cutting grass from the garden borders for her rabbits.

Sebastien had been absent at the call of duty. In the next *département* a murderous bandit had broken into a shop, cut up the shop-keeper and his wife into several separate parts, and then run off with their savings into the mountains. Sebastien and a score of his comrades had been sent down to augment the local gendarmes and it had taken them nearly three weeks to comb the deserted uplands before the bandit was run to earth.

Sebastien could have written to explain his sudden disappearance. But he shrank from putting anything on paper. He knew how weak were his powers of literary composition, how liable he was to err grammatically and orthographically, and he feared that a letter would be so full of blunders that it would be treasured up against him in the Cotillon household for years to come. He decided to risk Elodie’s displeasure. However sharp it might be and however clearly and vigorously expressed, it would be but transitory.

Judge of Sebastien’s gratified astonishment, then, when Elodie, at last finished with the rabbits, turned back towards the house and saw him still hesitating fearfully at the gate.

Expecting a volley of reproaches, he was given instead the most radiant smile with which Elodie had ever favoured him.

He began his explanations, assuring Elodie that nothing would have kept him away but the imperious call of duty. And Elodie, instead of mocking him, was saying most understandingly, ‘Oh, I knew. Oh, I knew. . . .’

‘You’ve no idea what it’s like up in those mountains—nowhere to buy paper and ink or a pencil.’

‘Oh, I can well believe it,’ Elodie assured him.

‘And I can tell you, we had no time to write. No sooner settled down for a bit than on we’d have to go.’

‘Oh, I know,’ purred Elodie.

She allowed him to take her by the arm. She did not move when

he took her hands. But for the sound of footsteps in the yard Sebastien would have embarked on his fifth proposal.

At supper that evening Sebastien dominated the table. He gave an immensely detailed account of the hunting of the bandit and the heroic part he had played in it, Charles Deschamps helping him to overcome his natural modesty by questions whose sly adroitness was lost on Sebastien but not upon Elodie.

Sebastien had not captured the bandit, but if the bandit had behaved fairly and reasonably that honour would have fallen to him. The bandit, instead of going up to the hill round which a cordon of gendarmes—including Sebastien—was moving, had bolted the other way and had been captured neatly with a whole skin by a local farmer—not a gendarme at all.

'Bit boring walking about moors like that for days, wasn't it?' asked Charles.

'Boring?—you'd have found it boring with bullets whistling about,' retorted Sebastien.

'Bullets?' asked Charles, wide-eyed.

'Bullets,' corroborated Sebastien.

'He had a rifle?'

'He had a rifle!' echoed Sebastien. 'If you'd had a bullet within a yard of your ears as I did you'd have known he had a rifle! And more than once, my friend. And more than once!'

After supper Sebastien got the chance he had been waiting for—his fifth proposal. In the long dragging days he had been absent he had thought out the words he would use.

'Elodie,' he began huskily, 'I'm being moved. I've got to go to a place up near Nantes. It's a lovely little place, I'm told, and if I were married I should have a little house all to myself. Won't you come with me? I'll let you have all your own way, Elodie. I know you've got a much better head for managing things than I have and you'll give me lessons in writing and sums and then I'll get through the exams and get promoted. . . .

'If you stay here you'll marry a farmer and you'll work from early morning till late at night and you'll get tired out and worn out before you're forty. If you come with me you'll be like a queen in a parlour. Just your rooms to look after. Just the cooking. Just your clothes. And we'd have a little garden and a run for fowls and a few rabbits. . . .

'Eh, Elodie? . . . eh?'

'All right,' said Elodie, and her head sank on to Sebastien's shoulder. The long siege was over.

Sebastien was not one to let the grass grow beneath his feet. He was on tenterhooks now lest Elodie should change her mind. He urged the advantages of an early wedding, and so it happened that Elodie and Sebastien were married before Germain or Gilberte.

The ceremony took place in the same church where a few months before the funeral rites of poor Alice Dupont had taken place, the chairs for the happy couple being placed on the spot where Alice had rested on her last journey to La Chataignerie. Amongst those present were Madame Rocambert and Euphemie, now officially affianced to Germain. Madame Rocambert and Euphemie caused a sensation. They arrived in a phaeton drawn by two silver greys and were clad in costumes of the very latest fashion. Madame Rocambert, moreover, smelt heavily of aniseed, a perfume with which the incense of the church waged vigorous warfare.

Naturally nothing would satisfy the Bertrands but a first-class wedding, and it was followed by a first-class dinner at the Café de Paris where Sebastien obliged with his complete repertoire on the bassoon. The two scales he achieved at the first attempt. The line written so many months ago by Germain was less successful. A cheering audience followed his progress, but it was not until the fourth essay that the end was triumphantly attained and Sebastien put down the instrument with a beaming, perspiring face.

All the guests saw them off. After the feast and when their wagonette was almost out of sight Monsieur Cotillon found to his amazement that he had been waving farewell with Sebastien's bassoon.

'But Sebastien will want that,' he cried.

'Want it!' retorted Charles Deschamps. 'He won't want that any more.'

Monsieur Cotillon looked at the bassoon. He had a moment of insight which dazzled him.

'Sebastien is not such a fool as they think,' he muttered.

## THE WHITE CLIFFS BECKON

KINDLY NEIGHBOURS kept Anne informed of the progress of Charles's courtship with Gilberte.

'I can't understand it,' they said. 'Felix won't give her a single field.'

And:

'She's so small. What good is she on a farm? Can't reach anywhere and how can you do farm work with such tiny hands?'

Anne heard them without comment. Charles had said nothing to her of Gilberte. She had never expected he would. There was a deep intimacy between mother and son but it was much too deep for words. It was the intimacy of unspoken thoughts and feelings.

Anne knew Gilberte to be good-tempered, industrious, sober, attractive to the eye and winning in her ways. She knew that all these qualities meant a woman of real worth but she would not have been true to her peasant stock if she had not wished that with them would come a few more fields and meadows to enlarge the kingdom over which her son was to rule.

The true peasant would have put the fields first and the qualities last. He would not have taken the qualities without the fields. Charles Deschamps was representative of a new generation. He and his like were rising above the restricted horizon of their tiny farms and were taking broader views.

Charles brought Gilberte home for the first time one evening in September.

It was a poignant moment in the lives of the two women. Sitting at the living-room table Anne watched Gilberte coming through the gate and walking up to the house. Here was the woman who was to take her place, who would now be consulted by Charles first instead of her, who would now monopolize his life.

Perhaps Gilberte realized all this. For a moment she stood hesitant at the threshold and then as Anne rose to her feet she ran forward with characteristic impetuosity and seized the hands of the older woman.

There were a score of things she would like to have said to assure Anne that she would never push her into the background, never treat her unkindly, but she could say none of them. To her astonishment and dismay she found her eyes filled with tears and she could not trust her voice.

'My dear,' whispered Anne, and Gilberte threw her arms around the other's neck.

Then, releasing her hands, Anne held Gilberte at arm's length, gazing with an admiration she did not attempt to conceal at Gilberte's comely figure from her head of deep brown ringleted hair to her trim little feet.

'Mais,' exclaimed Anne, 'you're pretty as a picture.'

The undisguised admiration of the one, unspoilt by any sign of

the envy which so often older women are unable to hide in their relations with younger, and Gilberte's naïve anxiety to please her mother-in-law-to-be, broke down all reserve between them. In all the long years they were to share in this house they never once had a serious quarrel.

Within a year of marriage Gilberte's first child was born, a son, Jules, and within the second year a daughter, Marie Thérèse.

Charles was in the seventh-heaven of delight but Anne, taking him into the barn just an hour after the arrival of Marie Thérèse, had damped down his elation by asking him whether he wanted to ruin Gilberte, and if his experience of stock breeding had taught him nothing.

Whether it was due to Anne's intervention or not, Marie Thérèse was the last child.

The two children grew up to display vastly different characters. Physically both were Deschamps—Jules eventually becoming taller than his father and much heavier. As Anne had always seen her dead Pierre in Charles, she now saw him again in Jules and with far greater reason. He had his grandfather's way of becoming absorbed in the present, oblivious of the past or future. He showed a remarkable aptitude for being taken in by less naïve minds. He would readily part with anything of his own, careless that he was making the poorest of bargains—a greater fault in peasant eyes than making no bargain at all.

His energy was overwhelming. He was always in a fight, always in a scrape if there was a scrape of any sort to be in. At six he fell into a pool, one of those pools to be found most unexpectedly in the meadows in the Creuse, fringed with tufts of reeds, in whose crystal depths the housewives beat their heavy homespun linen into spotless cleanliness. The water of these pools is always icy cold. After being fished out Jules waited until he was dry before going home and nearly died of pneumonia. At eight he climbed a tall cherry tree in pursuit of a magpie's nest. As he came down a stub of branch hitched him up by the leg and he hung downwards for an hour before his father could rescue him by means of a series of ladders tied to the tree.

Intellectually, too, he was like Grandpère Deschamps. He would swallow without question anything he found printed in a book. Charles still treasured his father's *Here One Learns All*, but had long found it too untrustworthy to rely upon. Jules discovered its treasures in time and amazed his parents by displaying an ability to reel off a page of the book almost verbatim after reading it once.

The facility grew. At school he could repeat a chapter of history or geography after reading it once or twice and he was equally apt in picking up arithmetic and mathematics. Against this brilliance Marie Thérèse cut a comparatively dull figure. Jules had all the impetuous, passionate nature of Gilberte, Marie Thérèse the quiet objectivity of her father. She was content to trail round with never a word at the heels of her boisterous brother, who made noise enough for a dozen. When he was about the air buzzed with his incessant outpourings.

But whereas Jules learnt his lessons without effort he forgot them with equal ease. Marie Thérèse had to plod through her books slowly and painfully but once she had done so the knowledge she thus acquired was hers for all time. She worked quietly and steadily, not in the tempestuous gusts of her brother. She looked at people with her father's eyes, silently, speculatively. Fine speeches, vague promises, never deceived her as they did Jules, and she was never tricked into giving away any of the secrets of the home and family as her ingenuous brother was always doing.

When the two children went off to the new national school Charles followed their lessons as eagerly as they did themselves. He read their books, admired their handwriting and showed off their reading to friends. Later he shared their studies, helped Marie Thérèse with her arithmetic, and taught himself geometry and algebra so that he could help her in these two subjects, which she found almost impossible to understand.

Her natural bent was towards modern languages. She had already displayed an aptitude for writing in her own language far in advance of her years, and whenever she chanced upon a volume or piece of writing or even a phrase written in an unknown tongue she would muse over it for hours.

Especially English. To this island, alleged by credible witnesses to lie across the sea to the north of France, and as good Frenchmen knew to be eternally swathed for its sins in an atmosphere of rain, wind and fog, Marie Thérèse's thoughts began to turn from a time when she herself could not remember. Why, let no one attempt to explain. She could have thought of sunny Italy or Spain or medieval Germany. Inexplicably her eyes and ears were always open when anyone could tell her anything of England. Perhaps the same mysterious forces which compel the cuckoo and the swallows and the butterflies to wing their way across the warm Mediterranean to the north were working their mysterious spell on this contemplative little woman whose horizons were the circle of hills



of her native Creuse and who had never met a soul who had ever seen the sea.

As the slow tranquil years passed these mysterious forces began to give shape and form to her thoughts and actions.

One day in came Madame Leroux, whose niece Elizabeth had gone to England as nurse to a rich Parisian family. Madame Leroux, besides bringing news of Elizabeth's experiences, which seemed to be a recital of a second Norman Conquest in which the impressionable Anglo-Saxons had gone down before the charms of the French nurse like ninepins, carried under her arm a broad album entitled 'Views of England'.

Marie Thérèse saw it and guessed what it contained. Impatient of the long chronicle of the latest episode of the Conquest, she longed to pull it from Madame Leroux's grasp and bolt with it into a corner where she could examine it undisturbed.

At long last, however, Madame Leroux, whilst still continuing her recital, did lay the album on the table and the Deschamps family bent over it, Marie Thérèse crawling under the table and forcing herself up in front of her father.

It was a noble collection, largely views of London—of St. Paul's, and the Tower and its Beefeaters, of Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament, but also of landscapes and cottages—Anne Hathaway's, of course, of the donkeys at Clovelly, of the cliffs at Land's End, of the castle at Edinburgh.

Marie Thérèse watched them pass in tense silence—impatient to see what was to come, reluctant to part with the present.

'But,' said Gilberte, 'they must have some sun sometimes—you can see by the shadows. It can't have been foggy when they took these photographs.'

'No,' answered Madame Leroux remorselessly, 'my niece says it's always foggy or raining. Never any sun.'

'But,' protested Charles, 'it must have been fine when these photographs were taken.'

'Ah,' explained Madame Leroux, 'you can make a camera tell all sorts of lies.'

Charles bent over a photograph taken from a Dartmoor tor, showing a great expanse of tiny fields and farms and groups of elms miniature as patches of parsley spreading out like a patchwork quilt.

'But it's a little country,' he said.

His keen eyes saw from the photographs that England was not built on the broad, generous, matronly lines of France, where a Normandy valley would swallow up one of the Home Counties.

Not many weeks after this the Deschamps family packed themselves into the dog-cart and set off for Boisselle-en-Nohantes, a visit they made about once a year.

Aunt Euphemie in her sitting-room had a small bookcase into which was tightly wedged her entire library. Marie Thérèse, reading through the twenty titles, ignored the *Livres Roses* of the Comtesse de Ségur of which the library was largely composed and stood almost rooted to the ground at the sight of a thin volume entitled, in English, *Alice at Cheltenham*.

She glanced round furtively. The others were all deep in their gossip. Slowly, centimetre by centimetre, like a thief, Marie Thérèse edged the book out. It was a school-book, an elementary reader in English. The heart of Marie Thérèse did the strangest things as her brain took in what it could of the book with its unknown words, and its pictures of English trains and policemen and London, and the college at Cheltenham. And then at the end there was a very full vocabulary, the first time Marie Thérèse had ever found a French-English dictionary.

She spent the rest of the day poring over her treasure, but all too soon the moment for departing arrived.

Hardly realizing what she was doing, Marie Thérèse found herself confronting Aunt Euphemie, who was still unburdening herself upon the woes of the tailor of 1905—cloth so dear, workmen so inefficient, customers so exacting. Marie Thérèse stood before her silent, almost petrified with terror at the guilty intentions which were dogging her, which she was helpless to resist.

'Eh, and thou, Marie Thérèse?' exclaimed Aunt Euphemie, at last conscious of her close at hand.

'Aunt Euphemie,' stammered the child.

'Well, what is it then?' demanded Aunt Euphemie.

'Could I?—could I?—borrow——' She could say no more. Crimson with shame she brought from behind her back *Alice at Cheltenham*.

Aunt Euphemie took the book.

'Oh, no,' protested Charles.

'Mais, non,' echoed Gilberte.

'Oh,' laughed Aunt Euphemie. 'This is the book from which I learnt English.'

Aunt Euphemie had had the benefit of a college education. She had spent years at a private school and, as she herself put it, she had 'learnt English'. *Alice at Cheltenham* was the alpha and omega of her English literature, and in the course of twelve months' lessons she

had got through the first eight pages, reaching the point where Alice was about to have her first interview with the redoubtable head of Cheltenham College. Aunt Euphémie's interest in the fortunes of Alice had never spurred her to try to discover how Alice got through the interview or what happened to her afterwards.

But now, in playful mood, Aunt Euphémie proceeded to give the company the benefit of her erudition, not yet having appreciated the enormity of the demand Marie Thérèse was contemplating making upon her.

'Do you know what the English say when they want their famous tea?—Haf you of the cup of dee tea?'

The company laughed at the queer sounds.

'I learnt an English pocm,' pursued Aunt Euphémie.

'Twanko twanko leetle sta—

'Ow I vonder vhot you ah—'

Another burst of laughter, but Marie Thérèse remained still rooted in front of her aunt grasping her treasure.

'Could I borrow it to read?' she whispered.

Aunt Euphémie's face fell.

'*Mais*——' she said, as though never a day passed without her reading a few paragraphs from the book. In fact she had never looked at it since she left the school and indeed for years had probably forgotten its existence.

'No—no,' said Charles.

'But what are you thinking about?' demanded Gilberte sharply.

'That costs dear,' sighed Aunt Euphémie, looking at the book.

'You've no idea what books like that cost.'

Charles stood up abruptly. If the book had cost half a sou Aunt Euphémie would not have parted with it willingly.

'You'll take great care of it,' said Aunt Euphémie.

'I'll cover it with brown paper, and I'll always wash my hands,' she assured her aunt.

Aunt Euphémie gave it up with a great sigh. 'It was my little school-book,' she said wistfully. It was, and no other had she so thoroughly detested.

In a dark corner of the stairs Uncle Germain caught Marie Thérèse alone whilst the others were collecting their things to go. He slipped a five-franc piece into her hand.

'Oh uncle,' gasped Marie Thérèse.

'Put it away,' whispered Uncle Germain. 'You know.'

Marie Thérèse knew all right.

In a few moments everyone assembled outside to take an affectionate farewell.

Suddenly there was a sharp ring on the cobbled pathway in front of the house.

Jules had dropped a five-franc piece.

The effect on the company was electric. Everyone was petrified with horror. The sun just then getting into bed for the night stopped fussing with the blankets of cloud drawn up around his chin, sat up and laughed, so that the fatal coin glinted in his last rays as it spun upward after striking the cobbles.

Jules with a cry rushed forward, but Aunt Euphemie was quicker than he. She held the coin tightly.

'But——' she gasped.

'It's mine,' shouted Jules.

'Who gave it to you?' demanded Aunt Euphemie.

'Uncle Germain,' said Jules.

Aunt Euphemie relaxed her grip. Jules took the coin.

'Ah,' breathed Aunt Euphemie. Aunt Euphemie's 'ah's' were not pleasant hearing. They were a mixture of prayer and sigh greeting each new discovery of human depravity.

This 'ah' boded no good for Uncle Germain, nor for that matter the clumsy-fisted Jules. Uncle Germain never again trusted his domestic peace into his hands.

For the rest of the leave-taking Aunt Euphemie gave her attention to a close scrutiny of Marie Thérèse. She took both her hands, the better to show her affection for her only niece, but they were innocent of five-franc pieces. She ran her eyes up her long black-stockinged legs, but no tell-tale circle pushed out in low relief there. When she was hoisted to her seat in the dog-cart her affectionate aunt could still hardly bear the thought of the coming separation and in the throes of her emotion ran her hands down the sides of Marie Thérèse's thighs, but no hard metallic substance rewarded this loving research.

'But,' she cried, 'your shoes aren't properly tied,' and in a flash she had slipped both of them off. But no five-franc piece fell out of them though Aunt Euphemie thrust a finger deep into the toe of each.

'The damn woman will undress the child if we stay any longer,' exclaimed Charles Deschamps in the patois of La Châtaignerie, which was not the patois of Boiselle.

He brought his whip sharply down across Coquette and the trap started forward with a jerk.

'Where did you put it?' asked Gilberte when the house of Rocambert was lost to view.

'There!' Marie Thérèse pointed to one of the lamps of the dog-cart. Inside lay the coin for which Aunt Euphemie had searched so diligently. Lying on the nickelled bottom of the lamp it had appeared to be part of it.

At the age of seven Marie Thérèse had looked at Aunt Euphemie quietly and silently and had taken her measure with remorseless exactitude.

## 13

## NO PENSIONS FOR THE PEASANTS

THE LATER YEARS of Anne's life would have been years of unbroken tranquillity but for two subjects which ever and anon disturbed her peace of mind.

One was the change which came over Charles and Gilberte and most of their generation. Anne had been brought up to believe that no lot could be more desirable than to be a Frenchman, and more than that a Frenchman actually owning a part of France. Such a man if not a king was as free as a prince. His life was to know and woo and subdue his mistress Nature, and upon the skill and art which he brought to this business depended the degree of his reward. And in what other country in the world is that mistress so lavish in her favours to those who win her heart as in France?

So too thought Charles and Gilberte when they began life together on the farm. They would have changed with no one, but as the years passed they began gradually to perceive that strange truth which has puzzled so many others in our day and generation. Growing food for their fellow-men, they would work from early morn till late at night, from early youth till in old age they could work no more, and at the end they would be no richer than they were at the beginning. At the most they would snatch an occasional day for holidays—a marriage, a christening, a funeral, a rare visit. For the rest of the year, Saturdays and Sundays alike, they must rise with the sun—in winter long before him—and go to bed long after he had disappeared. With advancing years, with failing strength, their children must carry on the work, their maintenance adding to the burden until they would deposit them in the com-

munal cemetery with a sigh of relief and thankfulness. Whereas others—Germain, say, or Sebastien. . . .

At fifty Sebastien would have a pension. Money that came in without turning a hair, which accumulated while he slept just as when he was awake. Sebastien already talked about it. And he would buy up a nice little '*greffe*', a clerkship to the local justice in a nice little town, and with a half-acre of ground, a few fowls, and a few rabbits, he and Elodie would live like lords.

And Germain. Germain never started till half past eight. He had his roll and coffee and his paper in perfect tranquillity, and then worked steadily till noon. He began again about two, after a gentle siesta, and worked on till six, when he would take a turn round the village—with a walking-stick and his collie, like an English milord. When he wanted a day off—or, rather, when Aunt Euphemie thought it right that he should have a day off—he had it. The apprentices and assistants went on stitching away. The business did not stop. There was never any chance of a cow getting through the hedge and filling herself up to suffocation with clover; no harvest field clamouring to be cut with the threat of ruin if the call was ignored. Germain's skill as a tailor brought in the peasants from far and wide. In Père Rocambert's day they had never kept more than one assistant and one apprentice besides Monsieur Rocambert himself. Now they had three apprentices and three assistants. The peasants filled the Rocambert coffers with their francs. Euphemie sighed at the cost of cloth and the idleness of assistants and the parsimony of her customers, but she and her mother knew they were now on the way towards becoming multi-millionaires—in francs. And the strange thing was that the little man who was laying in all this prosperity was slowly and surely passing completely under their domination, so that he hardly had the courage once a year to go and look up his relatives at La Chataignerie, or to ask Gilberte and Charles to spend a day with them.

Sebastien and Elodie never put him in this difficulty. They wrote regularly each year announcing the time of their arrival and their intention to stay a week.

Sebastien's annual holiday—'on full pay', as he always insisted—consisted of two weeks. But for his pension he would have spent all of it at Boiselle-en-Nohantes—where the food was abundant, the cooking good, and the visitors' bedroom, with its feather mattress and homespun linen sheets smelling of the fresh meadows in which they had been washed and dried and stretched, the last word in comfort. Madame Rocambert and Euphemie at first revolted

against this incursion, but hints and direct assault made no more impression upon Sebastien than they would have done upon a rogue elephant who had temporarily taken possession of the sitting-room.

Why he did not stay a fortnight puzzled them. He had no great love of La Chataignerie or of his relatives, and he could easily have run over there in the day. The truth was that nowhere other than at La Chataignerie were there so many people Sebastien knew to whom he could talk about his pension. He flashed it before their dazzled eyes as he might have dangled a watch before a child of twelve months. He trailed it as an Irishman trails his coat. And the results were nowhere so gratifying as at La Chataignerie—among the peasants and farmers of his boyhood days.

The notion that a man could stop working at fifty, as Sebastien was prophesying that he would do, and then would have to work no more, and so many francs would be brought to him by the postman was like a fairy tale—more astonishing than Aladdin, for Aladdin at least had to go to the trouble of rubbing the magic lamp whereas Sebastien, if he wished, could stay in bed and the postman would drop the money on the eiderdown. It was like being in paradise without having to go through the unpleasant business of dying first.

Charles and Gilberte were not unaffected by the phenomenon. Nothing gave Sebastien greater pleasure than talking to them about his pension and his coming era of ease and tranquillity, because he sensed it was the one thing he had which they envied.

'Sebastien Bertrand,' exclaimed Charles, not once but many times a year, 'the biggest fool in Creuse—he gets a pension at fifty. You and I and millions like us will work on to feed him and his like till we drop, and unless our children take pity on us and maintain us we'll be treated like paupers.'

To Anne's consternation they swore that neither Jules nor Marie Thérèse should stay on the farm. Jules should be an engineer—he showed considerable promise in mathematics and chemistry since he had been at a *lycée* at Châteauroux, and Marie Thérèse should be a teacher.

'But the farm,' exclaimed Anne.

'The people who pay Sebastien his pension can have that,' answered her son grimly.

Pensions were indeed in the air. Postmen were to have them, and the road-menders, and the magistrates' clerks, and everybody—porters included—on the railways.

At Boisselle-en-Nohantes, Sebastien's pension had nothing like the same success.

'I might retire myself at fifty,' said Germain, looking uneasily at Euphemie.

To his surprise she backed him up emphatically to score off Sebastien.

'Not going on for ever. We could retire at any time. We don't need to wait for anyone's permission, if it comes to that.'

Sebastien knew this was no idle bragging. Whenever he had spent a week at Boisselle there was always a steady trickle of customers for Germain's suits. And on Sunday mornings there was sometimes a queue.

For the delectation of every customer Mère Rocambert played the same little comedy to the opening movements of which she had treated Germain and his father Père Cotillon and Charles when they had come on other and more momentous business than the purchase of a new suit.

Into the shop she would come, turning one hand round the other with an absent air. The last thing she appeared to be expecting was to find a customer being measured up for a suit. A little start of surprise and then a cry of joyous recognition. Mère Rocambert knew everyone for miles around. No one came into the shop whom she did not know at once, the village or farm he came from, whether he was a believer or a free-thinker, anti- or pro-Maire, Republican, Royalist or Radical.

'But,' she would exclaim, 'it isn't Monsieur Hirondelle.' Indeed it was. 'But this isn't Jacques (Emile, Henri, Georges, Louis)?' Indeed, she would be assured, it was—in for his first man's suit of black serge. But hadn't he grown? But—he made her fear. But—wasn't he solid? But—he was well planted. But—he had the beautiful eyes of his father. But—the young girls. But—they had begun to notice them. But—of that she was sure.

Sometimes Monsieur Hirondelle came alone for a black suit for his second marriage. 'Oh, but,' Mère Rocambert would breathe, 'you think we don't know how devoted you were to Zélie (Agnes, Marie, Elizabeth, Georgette). But we do. We knew, how you nursed her. How you never left her. Never begrudged her the doctor—though he costs five francs a visit. But—poor soul (glance heavenward—sign of the cross). But (with conviction) Adèle (Phyllis, Zélie, Aimée, Désirée), she's lucky. Ah, but yes. She will be happy and so will you. Ah, but it is high time.'

In the spate of her sympathetic commentary Mère Rocambert



would become aware that the measuring and recording had been finished, that the white chalk had come to rest on the polished counter, that the customers were bestirring themselves to quit.

Now it was that Mère Rocambert's act reached its great moment. Placing herself between her customers and the door she would demand: 'But—you will go and not have something? But—you come once every ten years and then you can't stop for a glass? But—are you going to make me feel like a miser?'

And after all these reproaches, sure at last that her customers had abandoned thoughts of immediate flight, she would pop into the wings, that is to say, into her kitchen, where two or three trays were always ready each with a bottle of wine, some glasses and a box of 'Oontley an' Palmares Teen Loonsh' biscuits.

The 'Teen Loonsh' biscuits gave an esoteric touch to the ritual. The worthy peasants who consumed them would have been far less impressed if they had been a mere Petit Beurre or Maigre Déjeuner of French manufacture. 'Ree—add—ang' they would read on the tin.

'That's where they're made,' Euphemie would shyly explain. Her knowledge of English was well known around.

When in the summer of 1910 Mère Rocambert was carried up to bed one morning in the very middle of her act and the doctor an hour later diagnosed kidney trouble, which Madame Rocambert had diagnosed herself six years before, Euphemie at once took her place and the little play went on almost as if nothing had happened. Everything in the Cotillon-Rocambert establishment went on so exactly as it had always done that people seemed to forget that for one half-day it had been closed whilst Madame Rocambert was carried off to the cemetery on the other side of the town.

Euphemie went back and on went the show as before. Customers sometimes had to think twice before they realized that the part of the leading lady was being taken by the daughter and that the creator of the rôle was no more.

## RED SKY IN THE MORNING

**H**ARD AS WAS the lot of the peasant proprietors, nothing short of physical compulsion would induce them to try to improve their lot. Intelligent and gifted as he was, one lesson

Charles Deschamps never learnt. He thought he had only to point out a better way for it to be taken. The discovery of the stupidity and egotism of those with whom he had to live was always fresh and always disconcerting.

The cart road to Neuvy-le-Roi was uphill till it switchbacked up and down some half a dozen folds in the land as French roads are apt to do, regardless of the unceasing effort they impose on man and beast alike. In all it was a journey of six kilometres. A track of half that length, downhill all the way, through a pleasant river valley, ran from La Chataignerie. In winter for a hundred yards it was often flooded and almost impassable for carts. Charles Deschamps wanted to take this part of the road between one of his fields and three of his neighbours'. He pointed out the advantages they would gain. Most of their heavy loads went to Neuvy, and it would be downhill all the way. It was half the distance, and would take half the time.

'*Oui mais*——' growled Alphonse Herriot. 'What you mean is it'll be half the distance for you and it'll take you half the time.'

'Better tell my old moke that,' muttered Pierre Lehideux, 'it doesn't worry me.'

The road was never made.

Keener still, far keener, was his vexation when he could not induce sufficient of the villagers to agree to install electricity when the grid was laid along the Route Nationale. It would do everything. It would light their homes, their stables, their barns, turn their churns, raise water from their wells, cook for them. There would be an end to fumbling in the dark with hurricane lamps. No more messing with oil and wick.

The more lyrical Charles Deschamps grew over these things the greater became the distrust of the other villagers, and the more obstinate their determination to have no part in the introduction of this new force. Quite what it was and what it did was beyond their power to grasp. What they did see was that it was something of which Charles Deschamps would make good use or he wouldn't be so anxious to have it brought in. That was sufficient objection in itself for most of them. Deschamps was already doing far too well for their liking.

His neighbours found it very difficult to forgive his enterprise, his aptitude, his success. It is no pleasant experience to find yourself getting long in the tooth in the practice of the art and craft of husbandry and to have someone barely thirty producing twofold, threefold, sometime tenfold the crops that you are getting in.

Deschamps made no secret of his methods. He owed them to his skilled use of the various artificial manures and the careful rotation of crops. His neighbours could ban the road to Neuvy and could veto the introduction of electricity. They could not prevent him managing his fields and meadows in a way that produced many times more crops than did theirs.

As his years steadily mounted towards forty, as Jules and Marie Thérèse gradually lengthened out until to their intense delight they out-topped Matthieu, the four-foot-eight farm labourer whom Charles employed, he had two great aims which called for all the money he was earning from his successful farming—he wanted to educate his children so that they would be able to earn their livelihood in greater ease and amidst a higher culture than had been his lot and Gilberte's, and he wanted to modernize his barns and stables and farm buildings. The two enterprises went on apace.

When the two children returned from their schools at the end of each term it was to find that another tumble-down wreck of a stable had gone, to be replaced by brick and stone and concrete of bold and sanitary design. The house they lived in, which consisted of little more than the one large square living-room, had been built before the Revolution, possibly in the days of Louis Quatorze. It was dark and inconvenient. After he had paid his last school bills, after his last bullock was comfortably stabled, Charles planned either to have the house rebuilt or, if he could not bring himself to do that, to give it to Matthieu, who would run no risk of hitting his head against the beams, and build afresh nearby.

Like his father, though to him such thoughts had come much later, he now began to think not of retirement nor of a pension—he would never be able to retire altogether and would never want to—but of his grandchildren—the children of Jules and Marie Thérèse, who would come here in their holidays, busying themselves with the chickens and the calves. And he thought, as Pierre had done, of a pony and trap for them, in which he would meet them at the station and take them to Neuvy for a run, letting them take the reins and imagine they were assuming command.

In the long winter evenings Charles made baskets. Though Charles was a sad free-thinker and hopelessly compromised spiritually, Père Lamourette, La Chataignerie's priest, liked nothing better than to drop in upon him whilst he wove the osiers into artistic shapes and discuss the events of the moment with him. So too came the village schoolmaster and half a dozen others who knew of things happening beyond their horizons and outside their

own lives. In days of crises they would all come together and sip the hot coffee with which Gilberte plied them.

For Charles was something of a politician.

Sebastien was pleased facetiously to call him Delcassé, Gambetta, Poincaré, Clemenceau, to mock his pretensions to discuss such affairs. Many a true word is spoken in jest, and if it had been France's good fortune to have been able to replace some of the self-seeking mediocrities who occupied her highest offices with a man so honest and clear-sighted as Charles, her fate might have been happier than it has been.

At any rate, the intellectuals of the neighbourhood thought it worth while attending the 'Parlement Deschamps' (another of Sebastien's phrases). During their discussions Anne would perch herself on her bed at the back of the room and, forgotten in the half-light, would listen with beating heart. She heard of Agadir and Tangiers, of the Russian Alliance, and of the Entente Cordiale, and of the macabre freak with the moustache of twisted wire that jerked upwards at the ends who now ruled Germany.

Every now and again this fantastic clown would rattle his sabre and send scattering pell-mell over Europe a spatter of 'ks' and 'ngls' and 'tschke's', and the whole of the continent would be in a ferment. Outside the house in summer and inside in winter Charles and his friends debated them of an evening; and Anne, aloof and fearful, would listen with a sinking heart.

The voice had begun to speak again, 'You'll never see him again—you'll never see him again', and when Jules slowly reached his teens it changed to 'You'll never see them again'.

In 1910 Charles was forty. He would now be transferred to a territorial regiment with duties in the rear and no risk of front-line battle. Anne waited for him to announce that he had made the transfer and when it did not come timidly asked what he had done.

'I'm going to stay with my regiment,' said Charles. He was now a sergeant in it.

'But your father,' protested Anne. 'Wasn't that enough?'

'They killed my father,' muttered Charles grimly. 'I'll kill some of them.'

In despair she called upon Gilberte. 'But are you going to let him go to his death?' she demanded.

'If nobody goes,' said Gilberte, 'they'll kill us all.'

Never was the German problem put in simpler or more exact terms.

'*Et Jules?*' was all Anne could mutter.

Often of a morning when Charles got up the east was aflame with the sun as though a thousand towns were on fire. He saw it as a symbol. A day not distant would come when the towns and villages in the east would flame again and the Germans would be upon them once more.

This time would they stand alone as they had done in 1870? The Russians would fight with them. But the English? No one could say, and if they did would they be much use? They had a Navy but no Army. What was worse they lived, so it appeared to Charles, in the strangest of worlds, not a world of reality but of phantasy and make-believe, in a dream existence which no nation living next to the Germans could hope to inhabit without a rude awakening.

What had brought Charles to these conclusions was a short introductory course in English literature he had undertaken. Marie Thérèse had brought home from her *lycée* two translations from the English classics and her father worked his way through them with characteristic patience and objectivity, hoping they would throw some new and more favourable light on a people upon whose judgment and decision the existence of his country, of himself, and of his family, might depend.

He was gravely disappointed. One book was possibly of no great importance. At any rate, he had never heard of the author, someone called Lewis Carroll, and the book—'Alice in the Land of Marvels'. But the other—'A Dream in the Middle of a Summer's Night'—was more disturbing because it was by Veel-yamm Shakk-espeare, who was supposed to be not only one of the greatest writers of all time but most representatively English.

The contents of these books were profoundly disturbing. People who could write such stuff and people who could read it and then claim it to be amongst the greatest literature could have no sense of reality. What folly to depend on people who wrote and read about fairies; a man with a donkey's head; or a tea-party with a mad hatter, a dormouse and a girl; of conversations with lunatic duchesses.

Twelve months' residence next door to the accommodating Boche would knock all this fantastic nonsense out of them. Possibly before they had time to come down to earth they would have been knocked out altogether.

'*Les Russes—oui,*' was Charles Deschamps's considered judgment. '*Les Anglais—non.*'

## 15

## TRAFALGAR QUAND MÊME

CHARLES PASSED ON 'Alice' and 'Veel-yamm's' 'Dream' to Monsieur de la Castellane.

Alphonse de la Castellane owned the great mills at La Fontaine St. Martin where a tributary poured itself tumultuously into the Creuse.

He was a frequent visitor to the Deschamps farm. He often joined the priest and schoolmaster and Charles in their discussions, rarely taking part himself but listening with great gravity to what the others said.

An intimate friendship had sprung up between him and Charles because in recent years he had added to his business a new department for selling artificial manures. The peasants round, conservative to a man, could only with the greatest difficulty, if at all, be prevailed upon to give the new ventures a trial, but Charles lent himself and his fields to the experiments with enthusiasm. Moreover, he could be trusted to keep careful accounts of when the manure was applied and the amount and the results achieved as compared with other methods.

At harvest time, Monsieur de la Castellane might be seen at La Chataignerie as often as twice a week walking round the fields with Charles, now and again picking a head of corn and scrutinizing it with a keenly critical eye.

He was a striking figure whether on horseback or foot. He was much taller than most men. In summer he wore a frock-coat; in winter a great coat with a cape. His head was crowned with a broad-brimmed felt and was covered with a great shock of greying hair which continued downward to end in a wealth of curling beard. His blue eyes looked away into space. They twinkled and glinted according to his mood, but he rarely smiled. He was not an old man but he made one think of *antiquité*, of a towering cliff, of massive blue-black clouds, of the great mountains ridging the horizon to the south. Already now, at barely fifty, there was something venerable about him, patrician, aristocratic?

Sometimes Charles and the family spent the day with him at La Fontaine St. Martin. It was a great honour, but Monsieur de la Castellane treated them as if they were honouring him. He always

met the dog-cart in the drive in front of his house, and always insisted upon lifting Gilberte down, after which he would bow low to her with great solemnity, sweeping off his broad-brimmed hat as he paid her some carefully chosen compliment. For Monsieur de la Castellane made no secret of his admiration of Gilberte's beauty of face and figure.

Jules delighted in these expeditions. As often as not he managed to fall into one of the two rivers which ran behind Monsieur de la Castellane's house, and always there was a risk of his becoming entangled in the machinery of the mill. For Marie Thérèse these visits were a mixture of terror and joy. The great mill-wheels—three of them—thrashed the foaming water as it passed beneath, and the mill itself was a heart of machines in a darkness loaded with floating motes of pulverized corn. Immense rough-hewn timbers ran across the ceilings and upwards from the floor. To them, it seemed to Marie Thérèse, as she peered fearfully in at the door, that Monsieur de la Castellane had harnessed a great swarthy giant whose black muscles of steel glinted now and again as they moved rhythmically at their work. Walls, doors, wooden stairways thick with white dust, all trembled and shuddered as he threw himself into his labours, filling the whole place with the noise of his grumblings and protests.

Sometimes Monsieur de la Castellane would pick Marie Thérèse up and walk round the place with her in his arms as if she had been a favourite kitten. These were the most fearful moments of all. She dared not protest. She could not speak. She could only look at Monsieur de la Castellane with saucer-wide eyes. Seen at the distance of a foot or so, Monsieur de la Castellane's face with its furrowed cheeks, its surging beard, its fierce blue eyes surmounted by his frowning brows, was an awe-inspiring memory which Marie Thérèse never forgot.

It was on one of these visits that Monsieur de la Castellane handed back to Charles Deschamps 'Veel-yamm's' 'Dream' and 'Alice' with a grim shaking of the head.

They sat on a seat outside the house, the mill-race making a subdued drone to their forebodings.

Monsieur de la Castellane picked up the 'Land of Marvels' once again as if hoping after all to find something of sanity and reality.

He read aloud:

'The Walrus and the Carpenter were walking close at hand. They wept like anything to see such quantities of sand.'

Monsieur de la Castellane closed the volume quietly and put it

down. He looked at Charles. Charles looked at him. There was nothing to be said. They sat for a time in silence.

'If one depends on people like that——' began Monsieur de la Castellane and ended with a gesture.

'On the sea they may be different,' said Charles thoughtfully.

'Yes,' allowed Monsieur de la Castellane, 'on the sea they may be different.'

'After all,' continued Charles, 'Trafalgar.'

'Yes,' agreed Monsieur de la Castellane, 'Trafalgar.'

Both men lapsed into a deep silence. Both were thinking . . .

'Trafalgar, *quand même!*'

## 16

1914

CHARLES DESCHAMPS WENT off in 1914 very much as his father had done in 1870. There was much the same hulla-baloo and shouting and laughing in the village square. Much loud talking and boasting, especially from those who were not to go. And as forty-four years before, it was nearly midnight before everyone was mustered and the men of La Chataignerie swung off on the Neuvy road to the strain of the 'Chanson du Départ'.

Charles did not ask Gilberte to stay in the house. She walked with him to the Mairie and when he took his place in the ranks she stood watching quietly and without speaking, with Anne on one arm and Marie Thérèse on the other. They were not supporting her. She was supporting them. Both were in tears, Anne nearly collapsing, but she would not stay in the house. She could not go through that again.

'It's right,' Charles had said, 'it's the only thing.'

'Oui,' answered Gilberte.

She had steeled herself to meet the German challenge without flinching; dry-eyed and firm-lipped. While Charles was away she would take his place. If he never came back, she would carry on the farm alone. The flaming torches lit up her pale set features as Anne hid her head on her shoulder, and Marie Thérèse wept almost unconsciously and watched the marshalling of the men of the district.

Pierre had been killed within a month of the outbreak of war. When Charles survived as long Anne began to take heart again. Then week by week his letters came and when Jules and Marie



Thérèse were at school there was always a weekly letter for them too. The family began to feel more as if he had been recalled for an unusually long period of training than that he had gone off to war. There was little in his letters to remind them of it, doubtless because when Charles found a quiet hour to write home, his thoughts were not for the moment of battle and the progress of the campaign but of the farm he had left and of his children at school and of Gilberte carrying on alone as best she could.

But every now and again they were shocked out of the composure into which Charles's letters lulled them. There was indeed a war on. The angel of death was abroad in the land and was striking at random now at this house, now at that. La Chataignerie, like the thousands of villages up and down the broad lands of France, was slowly but steadily going into mourning. Already in 1915 every fourth woman went through the village veiled in black for a father, a husband, or a son. Steadily they increased until at the last one looked at the woman not in mourning as something strange and unnatural. France had taken up the white man's burden against the barbarian far more than any other country had ever been called upon to do. Her women were paying in full.

Whitsun, 1916, Charles came home on leave. That week for the Deschamps family heaven came down to La Chataignerie. Both Jules and Marie Thérèse were at home and both had brought back from school excellent reports, for even the erratic Jules was now working steadily at his engineering. As for Marie Thérèse, Madame Bordat, her headmistress, was in rhapsodies over her progress in English, her good temper, and her reliability. Charles pored over these reports time and again and made copies to take back to battle with him. His face was radiant as he watched his two handsome children making such fair promise.

Marie Thérèse went through the week like a sleep-walker. She was never away from her father's side if she could help it. She liked best to stand silently behind his chair as he talked over a cup of coffee, listening not to what he was saying but to the sound of his voice and his pleasant laugh. Weeks afterwards she would go off to a quiet corner where in silence she would still hear her father's voice and catch the beloved tone and inflection.

When he went into the village she followed him, his faithful shadow, linking arms with him shyly as though he were her first lover. One day they drove in the dog-cart to Boisselle, where even Aunt Euphémie seemed pleased to see them and brought in the tray of wine and "Teen Loqonsh" just as if they had been strangers.

On Whit-Sunday Gilberte suggested that they should go to Mass and to everyone's astonishment Charles agreed.

The worthy curate had a good congregation and did not perceive Charles amongst his flock until half-way through. At a moment when his baritone was soaring triumphantly upward in one of his favourite frontal attacks on an imaginary heaven above the broad bare beams of the church roof he suddenly caught sight of Charles, stopped to make sure his eyes were not playing him tricks, and then had to start the upward thrust over again.

After the service he hurried round to the main door without removing his vestments and caught the Deschamps as they emerged into the bright sunlight. He took the hands of the man with whom he had had so many exciting discussions into his own and could only ejaculate, '*Mais . . . mais . . . mais . . . mais.*'

Charles could have done nothing which would have delighted him so much as to come to his service. Oblivious of the rest of his flock passing by, he pressed Charles for an account of his experiences.

Charles told them modestly.

His division was one of Foch's army. It had fought in Lorraine, had held Châlons, whilst the army from Paris cut round the invader's right and forced him back. They had gone north to hold the Channel ports with the Britanniques.

'*Et les Anglais?*' demanded Père Lamourette.

'Oh, the English,' replied Charles. 'They're good but—they treat the war as if it were a game.'

'Ah,' commented the reverend father understandingly, 'they are not serious.'

'They would be serious all right if they lived a bit nearer the Boche,' said Charles.

In the evening Père Lamourette, Monsieur de la Castellane and the schoolmasters from La Chataignerie and Neuvy came to dinner.

It had been a day of high summer, the hot sun bringing out the fragrance of the meadows now once more thick with their fleece of hay and almost ready for the scythe. Charles and Jules had carried out the long table in the living-room to the front of the house and they had eaten the dinner under the pergola over which a vine had been trained.

The night fell before the feast came to its end. It was dark and still. Not a breath stirred the warm air. Gilberte set candles on the table and to Marie Thérèse it seemed as if they were seated in a dark cavern underneath the world. The house, the trees, even the black, muscular branches of the vine just overhead, disappeared.

They were surrounded by the walls of the dark night, so real that they looked like velvet that you could touch and sweet-smelling with the scents which the hot sun had drawn out from grass and wild flower.

Monsieur de la Castellane filled up with his immensity all one end of the table. He declaimed some of Hugo's poetry which tried to put into words the anguish France had felt when Alsace and Lorraine were torn with brutal violence from her flanks. And when he had done he produced a bottle of brandy from his pocket and said very quietly:

'Gentlemen, I ask you to drink with me to the restoration of our lost provinces. I give you my word of honour that what this bottle contains will be worthy of the toast.'

It was. It went to everyone's head, affected as all were by what they had already drunk. Even Charles was so roused by it as to allow himself to be persuaded to sing a song. With Marie Thérèse still grasping one of his hands, he sang the 'Madelon'.

Into the silence of the night, into the darkness, exalted voices shouted the chorus:

'Madelon, Madelon, Madelon.'

## 17

## A TELEGRAM

THE YOUNG LADIES of the *Lycée pour Jeunes Filles* at St. Gaultier who were taking the English course in 1916 were an exceptionally brilliant class, obviously far more advanced than the ladies of the same class in preceding years, no doubt spurred on to greater efforts as a compliment to the old enemy of their country now turned friend.

Any one of them could have repeated to you at a moment's notice in faultless English:

God-da sev oor gre-shus Keeng-a  
 Long-a leeve our nobell Keeng-a  
 God-da sev oor Keeng-a.  
 Send 'eem veectoreeus  
 'Appy an' glorious  
 Long-a to reign ovair us  
 God-da sev de Keeng!

Yet despite this high standard, despite too the fact that she was a year younger than the average of the class, Marie Thérèse was far ahead of all her classmates.

Her case indeed was desperate. For a long time she had been able to pick up an English book and read it without undue discomfort. There was no danger in this whilst she wandered over the bold uplands and the open rolling downs of English literature, under the surveillance of such elderly and eminently respectable gentlemen as Dickens and Thackeray and John Ruskin. But from here she blundered on into the woodland glades and the elysian meadows of English poetry; enchanted regions haunted by the spirits of Shakespeare, Tennyson, Byron, Burns, Keats and Shelley.

No one who enters this fairyland is ever again the same. Certainly Marie Thérèse was not. The music and the rich imagery of the lines she read stirred her heart as surely as the approach of an officer or even a reasonably presentable ranker set off those of her less imaginative companions.

On either side the river lie  
Long fields of barley and of rye,  
That clothe the wold and meet the sky;  
And thro' the field the road runs by  
To many-tower'd Camelot. . . .

She was filled with a wild longing to see this England which created men who could adorn her with such rhythmic jewels.

Last straw of all she discovered Shelley. His ethereal spirit was still strong enough to capture the heart of Marie Thérèse, though it was nearly a hundred years since his godlike body was burnt to ashes on the beach at Spezia. The heady wine of his poetry made her temples throb and sent her about the school and the farm when she was at home like a sleep-walker. Little did her friends suspect the wild company she was keeping. The spirit of the dead poet brought her no more happiness or peace of mind than he did in the days of the flesh to those unhappy maids who came under his spell.

Not only did Marie Thérèse read Shelley's poetry. She got hold of books of his life. She stood again in the shoes of the unhappy Harriet Westbrook and the no happier Mary Godwin. She turned again and again to the north; to that fog-bound island where he had been born, where he had lived much of his little life. Perhaps even now, warring bitterly with Oxford deans and wandering ignored in the Clerkenwell streets, there was yet another Percy Bysshe at this very hour. The thought made her catch her breath sharply.

There were no classes in the afternoon at St. Gaultier during the summer terms. It was too hot for classrooms. It was Marie Thérèse's custom to go off alone with her books to the shade of a cluster of alders beside a river at the bottom of the school grounds and read until it was time for the evening meal. Madame Bordat had discovered a scheme whereby a few French girls were selected yearly by examination to take a scholarship which would allow them to go free to England. Marie Thérèse was to take this examination at the end of the present summer term—now hardly a week distant.

One afternoon, half-asleep, almost comatose with hours of long reading, she came up from the river. In the hall Madame Bordat, the headmistress of the school, overtook her and touched her gently on the shoulder.

Still far from out of her dream-world Marie Thérèse turned and they walked into Madame Bordat's sitting-room together.

'Won't you sit down?' asked Madame Bordat. She spoke a little unsteadily. This was about the tenth occasion when she had had to go through a similar interview with her pupils and practice had not made them easier to undertake. She glanced uneasily at the child before her. She knew the deep passionate nature which lay beneath the quiet self-possessed air she presented to the world moving round her.

'Sit down, Marie Thérèse,' said Madame Bordat again. She stopped short. Suddenly Marie Thérèse had come out of her dream. Her eyes were hard and fixed. They never moved from the opened telegram Madame Bordat held in her hand. She grasped the back of her chair with white knuckles. In a harsh gasping voice she cried, 'I know. My father. They've killed him,' and she fell heavily on the polished floor.

She came back to consciousness in a few minutes to find herself on Madame Bordat's bed. She sat up sharply. Yes, she knew—they had killed her father.

'I must go back to my mother,' she announced. 'My mother is alone.'

'You can't go back to-night, child,' said Madame Bordat, 'there are no trains.'

'To-morrow then. I must go back to-morrow.'

'So you shall, Thérèse,' agreed Madame Bordat. 'I will take you back with me. I may be able to help your mother too.'

'No, no, no,' protested Marie Thérèse. The thought of Madame Bordat, used to all the comforts of the bourgeoisie—well-furnished, carefully kept rooms, carpeted floors, walls hung with papers and

pictures, and elegantly served meals—walking in upon her mother unexpectedly and finding the house in disorder drove all thoughts of her grief from her mind for the moment. She bent herself fiercely to the task of dissuading Madame Bordat from taking her home. She was no snob. She would not have exchanged the one-roomed farmhouse which was her home for all the bourgeois houses in Creuse, but the thought of Madame Bordat, the most delicate and fragrant lady she had yet met, picking her way through the yard and peering into the dark interior filled her with dismay.

Madame Bordat guessed what was behind her vehement protests, and in spite of the child's distress she almost smiled to think that this should concern her so much at such a moment.

'Very well, Thérèse,' she agreed, 'I will put you on the train.'

Exhausted, Marie Thérèse fell back on the bed. She woke up some hours later astonished to find she had been asleep. She looked round the room. She was still in Madame Bordat's bedroom. A nightlight was burning, diffusing a dim, humble radiance. She went to sit up and found Madame Bordat, still dressed, sitting beside her. Someone had undressed her. Her clothes were folded on a chair. She was wearing a nightdress she had never seen before, made of fine linen and edged with narrow lace.

Like a surging storm came flooding in the recollection of why she was here.

She fell back and hid her face in the pillow. 'My father, my father. Oh, my father.'

Madame Bordat bent over her with a glass in her hand. 'Take a sip of this,' she whispered gently. But Marie Thérèse shook her head.

'They've killed him,' she moaned. 'I want to die. I don't want to live.'

Madame Bordat stroked the curls which fell in disorderly masses over the pillow.

'We Frenchwomen must live,' she murmured, 'if France is to live. And France must live. There is so much for France to live for. She has given the world so much, and she has still so much to give. The Germans who are killing our husbands and fathers and brothers can offer the world only brutality and cruelty and ugliness. We can give it beauty and friendliness. But we must go on living if we are to do it. I know how you feel, Marie Thérèse.' You know what happened last year.'

Marie Thérèse hid her face in the older woman's shoulder. Last year Emile Bordat had been killed on the Ysa.

'I know what it means, but if our men die for France then surely we women must live for her!'

Marie Thérèse reached home that evening to find her mother standing over her grandmother's bed.

'I believe she had a stroke,' said Gilberte.

Marie Thérèse was accustomed to her mother's habitual composure, but she did not expect to find her still as composed as ever. She turned from her to her grandmother, who wept copiously for her dead son. Her mother seemed unnatural.

'But you don't cry,' protested Marie Thérèse in the midst of one of her own uncontrollable gusts of weeping.

'I can't,' answered Gilberte, 'I wish I could.'

'But when the telegram came . . .'

'I already knew,' said Gilberte.

'Already knew? When?'

'I felt it—as we sat in the church on Whit-Sunday. Something suddenly told me and I knew.'

'And you never told anyone?'

'No.'

For three months Gilberte had gone about her business bearing in her heart the terrible presentiment which had proved only too true. Marie Thérèse looked at her mother with awe. The words which Madame Bordat had breathed over her in the small hours of the morning came back to her.

'If our men die for France then surely we women must live for her!'

Gilberte's set lips, her drawn cheeks and her steady gaze showed that she needed no such exhortation. She knew the path fate had chosen for her. She followed it fearlessly and uncomplainingly, eyes defiant, head gallant and unbowed.

If Marie Thérèse understood this with difficulty, she found her brother a baffling enigma. Gilberte had sent him a telegram, as she had done to Marie Thérèse, telling him of his father's death, but he had waited until the end of the term to come home. Upon arrival he wept dutifully for quite ten minutes, and then to Marie Thérèse's astonishment in the very act of drying his eyes he informed them proudly that one of his schoolfellows had asked him to spend the last fortnight of the holidays upon his estate in the Cevennes for some shooting. He took it for granted that he would be going back to college after the holidays. Where his mother was to obtain the fees and how she was to carry on with the farm never seemed to enter his head.

'How he is like my poor Pierre,' murmured Anne.  
How indeed!

## 18

## NEVER MORE

**I**F HEAVEN HAD seemed to Marie Thérèse to come down to La Chataignerie at Whitsun, certainly now it was hell with little more than life-long purgatory to follow. She could not believe that such sorrow as this could ever heal, and when Gilberte and Anne tried to comfort her by telling her that it would she was angry at the thought that her grief for her dead father would ever become less intense.

For the next weeks the days passed in frenzies of grief which when over would leave her colourless and listless. She would wake up at night and clench her sheets as she thought she would never see her father again. Never. Never. Never. Never. The world went on around her, making no impression on her. She was alone with her thoughts of her father. She did the jobs and went the errands that Gilberte found her to do in an effort to make her think, even if it were for only a matter of minutes, about something else, but her thoughts were ever away to the north, to Picardy where her father was last seen alive. Often she got half-way through a piece of work and then left it, having completely forgotten what it was she had been doing.

Everything around her reminded her of her father. Opposite the very door was the new well that he had dug nearly single-handed thirty feet down, passing up bucket after bucket of clay to Matthieu at the top before he reached the water he had always said was there. Inside the barn was the dog-cart he had built himself with the harness he had stitched. He had taken it to go courting her mother and how many times had it not taken them, her father at the reins, on some delightful outing, to a market, a fête, an agricultural show. Ah, now, even a day with Aunt Euphémie was rose-coloured. She would sit mournfully on the shafts. The original stain and the varnish and the black lines still made a gay show after these twenty years. How beautiful it must all have been when her father, with a white favour in his whip, helped his newly wed wife up to the seat after their wedding and they drove back to the farm side by side.



She hated the green gate beyond the barn. She had loved to get home from school before he expected her. She would hear his sabots on the cobbles before he reached the gate and she would run to stand just this side of it as he opened the gate. She could see now his radiant smile when he caught sight of her.

He would never come through that gate again. She would never hear the clump of his approaching sabots. She would never see his smile again. Never. Never. Never.

As the days passed a new terror possessed her. What little was left to her of her father was stealthily being stripped from her. She could no longer see him in her mind's eye moving about the farm as readily or clearly as a little while before. She could not hear his voice speak when she was alone. Always she had been able to do that. Now that was being taken from her.

It was an unfortunate moment when Matthieu tried to console her. 'That's how I felt,' he said, 'when my mother died. But after a time it goes and you—just forget.'

'Yes, I know,' said Marie Thérèse fiercely, 'it's happening now. I can't even see how my father looked and I can't recall how he—spoke, because you're all around me. I hear you and I see you and you're all getting between me and my memory of him. I can't even be allowed to keep that, and my father was worth a hundred of any of you.'

'Marie Thérèse,' cried Gilberte, horrified.

'Let her alone,' said the good-natured little man. 'She's right too. The *patron* was worth a hundred of me, or any of us. And he's taken—and we're left.'

When the sun was in the west it lit up the little cemetery at La Chataignerie which lay above the village on a hillside. Marie Thérèse would gaze at it and think, 'If only he was buried there—I could go and sit with him.'

She had the Latin's veneration for the body of the beloved even when the spirit has fled. If only there was some graveyard behind the trenches where her father had been laid to rest, some day she could go there and feel she was with him again. She could feel that she was near to him once more as in the days when she would stand behind his chair or link her arm in his.

Alas, they knew now that even this was denied, for Charles Deschamps had been blown to pieces by a shell. A brutal mass of steel and explosive had hurtled him into oblivion and dust.

All she could do was to hurry through the village, heedless of neighbours who greeted her, and creep into the village church and

sit for hours in the pew her father had sat in when he went there on his last Whit-Sunday.

One afternoon the worthy Father Lamourette found her thus, sobbing as if her heart would break. He attempted the usual consolations of his calling but at last gave up the effort and wept unashamedly himself.

One thing Gilberte was able to spare her. It was a letter Charles had written to his daughter which had reached her school after she had gone home and had been sent on from there. It was a gay little note describing in lively phrases the farms and towns of Picardy on the rolling hills and in the river valleys behind Peronne and ending with this apocryphal phrase: 'Perhaps you will see me before you expect and when you do you won't recognize me.'

With the letter were two five-franc notes which Charles had saved for her out of his meagre pay.

## 19

### MADAME BORDAT PAYS A CALL

**A**BOUT A WEEK after Jules had departed, after noisy adieux, for his shooting in the Cevennes Marie Thérèse was standing at the door of the house, lost in one of those brown studies in which she now seemed to spend most of her days, when she suddenly became conscious of a tall, slender lady dressed in black smiling at her from the gate which she was pushing open.

Marie Thérèse's heart stood still. It was her headmistress, Madame Bordat.

For one panic-stricken moment she glanced into the house. Her mother cared nothing for the tidiness of the living-room. All her thoughts were on the farm, the animals and the crops. Fortunately Anne was up and about again, always as before sweeping and putting things straight, and the room was in fair order.

Timidly Marie Thérèse went to meet Madame Bordat.

'Ah, child,' she exclaimed, 'I thought I should never find you.'

With the appearance of Madame Bordat came bounding back the memory of her school and her plans. Not once during the weeks she had been home had she thought of them. Now everything came back.

She had completely forgotten the examination which she was to

have taken the week following the news of her father's death. Upon it depended her chances of going on with her studies and of even getting to England.

England—Shelley. Never once had she thought of them. How distant, how inaccessible they seemed now. She would never go back to school. If her mother could keep Jules at college for another year or so, she certainly would not be able to keep them both, and now she had no wish to go on. She would stay with her mother and help on the farm.

Gilberte, hearing voices, came to the door.

'This is Madame Bordat,' said Marie Thérèse shyly.

The mourning black which both women were wearing seemed to make them sisters at once. Without a word they clasped hands and to Marie Thérèse's astonishment Madame Bordat bent over her mother and kissed her.

She took a chair and sat before the glowing embers of the great open fire. Marie Thérèse studied the face of her headmistress as she had never done before. What small, fine features she had, what a gentle expression, how pleasing was her quiet voice, how beautifully fashioned were the hands folded tranquilly on her knees.

For the first time she saw her not as a headmistress but as a woman. Gazing at her in awed silence Marie Thérèse thought, 'She looks like the Madonna.'

'I thought it would help you if I came to see you,' said Madame Bordat in her firm low voice.

And then she explained to her astonished audience of three what she had done since Marie Thérèse had come home. Realizing that there could be no question of Marie Thérèse's sitting for the examination for the English scholarship she had waited until the end of the term. Then, collecting a formidable bundle of her pupil's work, she had gone to Paris and invaded the Ministry of Public Instruction. To her demand that they should see that Marie Thérèse be given one of the scholarships without examination a succession of officials, passing upwards from a minor to a major scale, had assured her that the proposition was quite impossible. At last, however, Madame Bordat's mild but irresistible persistence brought her face to face with the Minister himself. Marie Thérèse, she told him, was not only the best pupil of the year but the best pupil of the county and that she had ever had. On a hot August afternoon this same Minister, who was in Paris only by the merest mischance and was to take the train that evening for Biarritz, was invited, nay, commanded, to read an essay on the influence of the Lyrical Movement on English

Poetry. He set it aside with a head which swam, only to be confronted with something worse headed 'Percy Bysshe Shelley—His Influence on Contemporary Thought'. Seeing the importunate widow armed with a full quiver of similar barbs he capitulated. Marie Thérèse was to have one of the scholarships without examination.

There was a silence. The scholarship would have to be taken up for five years. Gilberte was thinking how she could manage to pay the extras which were bound to arise and keep her in books and clothes.

'I can't go, Madame Bordat,' whispered Marie Thérèse. 'Mother can't do it. It wouldn't be fair. We've got to keep Jules at his college. He's a boy.'

Madame Bordat drew her against her and went on.

'I know it won't be easy but we must do it. We know so little of the English and the English know so little of us. We must do all we can to increase the numbers of young people we send to England like this and get them to send their boys and girls here. We've got to stand together now. Unless we do the Germans will overwhelm us both. They think of nothing and live for nothing but making war, and their people will scheme and work for war when ours will only think of other, happier things. Then suddenly they are upon us before we're ready. But if England and France stand together, always, they'll think twice before they start again. But we shan't stand together unless we know each other better and know that we've got to depend on each other and can depend on each other. If we win this war and fall apart afterwards we may find ourselves in greater peril of the Germans than ever.

'So the more Frenchmen who learn to know and love England and the more Englishmen who learn to know and love France the better. These scholarships are one way of doing this. As there are so few of them we must see that only those who really want to know the English should go and that is why I so want Marie Thérèse to go. . . .

'Now, will you let me help, Madame Deschamps? I have no child. Like you I have no husband. Whilst Marie Thérèse is at the *lycée* let me get her what few clothes she will need and her books and things like that.'

'*Mais*. . . ' began Gilberte hesitantly.

'You will let me?' Madame Bordat leaned forward in earnest appeal. 'I feel so much that Marie Thérèse should have the chance to go. The more links we can forge between England and France the better it will be for civilization, for culture, for us all . . .'

So it was that Marie Thérèse was able to take up her scholarship. Madame Bordat remained at the farm for the next four days. Marie Thérèse could never get over the wonder of seeing her, so delicate and looking so fragile, moving about the dark old farmhouse. She wanted first to sleep in the living-room in the bed Jules had been occupying, but Marie Thérèse insisted upon giving up her room.

Seeing the awe and astonishment with which Marie Thérèse followed her movements, Madame Bordat guessed her thoughts and laughed.

'My dear child, do you think I don't know what it is to live on a farm? I was born in a much smaller house than this and my parents had a much smaller farm.'

## 20

## SEBASTIEN'S MILITARY MEDAL

THE SPRING OF 1916 was remarkable for the appearance in the Deschamps farmyard of nine ducklings. Whose was the bird which laid the eggs was never ascertained. But the induction ceremony was performed by a hen which was beyond question one of Gilberte's flock. Three weeks later this hen, finding that there was something fundamentally wrong with them, abandoned her charges and the ducklings were left to fare for themselves, which they did with no difficulty at all.

They took possession of a small stable aloof from the hen roost and every morning they sallied forth just before sunrise. They were all pure white. There may have been sexual differences between them but to the uninitiated observer all looked alike, possibly all ducks or all drakes. They proceeded always in Indian file and Matthieu used to assert that they always went in the same order: number one always number one, number two, number two, and so on.

They went off at sunrise making straight for a gap in a hedge and then in a bee-line across fields and meadows until they disappeared. And at about sunset back through the hedge they emerged, competing with the fowls for a share of the corn Gilberte threw to them at that time, and then to bed.

Always the nine came back. It was a constant wonder that none

ever was reported missing, the victim of a dog or a vagrant's ambush. Until late September they led a charmed life. Then one morning they found, upon arising to sally forth and greet the dawn as was their wont, that the door of the stable had been closed upon them. They protested against this infringement of their liberty with enormous clamour until stealthily the door opened and they found themselves faced with the purposeful gaze of Gilberte and Matthieu at closer range than they had ever encountered them before.

Suddenly Gilberte and Matthieu made a forward movement. The ducks shouted and crashed about their narrow confines and then, finding the exit no longer barred, fled. But not the nine. Numbers two and eight remained in the hands of the enemy, and for the next few days the file went in and out and around the farm, forsaking the fields and streams for which they had hitherto invariably made in a vain search for their lost comrades.

Two and eight meanwhile lost their lives and their feathers and were expertly trussed and now lay side by side in Gilberte's oven, filling the room with the most appetizing odour.

Matthieu looked at them when Gilberte drew them out from time to time.

'To kill that for a type like Sebastien,' he said mournfully.

'I haven't killed them for Sebastien,' replied Gilberte. 'I've killed them for my sister and Germain.'

She looked forward to seeing them. Nothing pleased her more than giving her own folk a good meal.

'Yes, but he'll have a good bit more than either Elodie or Germain,' replied Matthieu bitterly.

There was no one he hated more intensely than Sebastien. He oozed satisfaction and patronage over Matthieu, satisfaction that he was not the dwarf nor the insignificant person that Matthieu was. He gave Matthieu orders which Matthieu would pointedly refuse to obey.

Sebastien's holiday came every September. He came first to Boisselle and then he and Elodie hired a dogcart to come over to La Chataignerie with Euphemie and Germain to spend the day with Charles and Gilberte.

'After all,' Sebastien had pointed out to Euphemie and Germain, 'they expect you to provide them with a dinner a year so why shouldn't they provide you with one?'

With this Euphemie feelingly agreed. Sebastien left her and Germain to pay for the dog-cart. He and Elodie remained for the last week of their holiday at La Chataignerie.

Sebastien's holiday and this annual expedition were more carefully synchronized than a superficial observation would disclose. The real object of their coming was to take back with them what they euphemistically described as a 'little bag of apples'.

The 'little bag of apples' really meant two large sacks each per family.

France can provide you with almost every fruit you can wish for except a good eating apple. Its orchards are full of cider apples and its gardens are full of pears, peaches and cherries, but you will look far before you find a good apple.

Charles Deschamps had noticed this very early in his day and he had planted in a corner of a field close to the front of the house some score or so of eating apple trees of which about a dozen produced a smallish yellow apple, red where it met the sun, called 'Caux's orangsh peepen'.

It was these apples in particular for which Sebastien made his annual pilgrimage with the regularity of a devout. The size and unimposing exterior of the 'Caux's' at first led Sebastien to despise them—his natural predilection was for something large and red—but these prejudices conquered and the flavour of the fruit in November and December experienced, he asked for nothing else. When gathering them at the farm he did his best to give the impression that they were of no more value than the common cider apples ripening in their thousands in the orchard over the hedge, but when back at his house in the *gendarmerie* he handed out one or two to specially favoured friends he exacted full tribute for their merits.

'Eh,' he would demand, his own mouth full, 'that's an Englishman's Caux's orangsh peepen. That's the way the English grow champagne, eh?'

The ducks, numbers two and eight, had lost their lives to provide the apple-gatherers with their annual feast.

'For,' as Sebastien had argued in talking over the matter at Boisselle with Euphemie and Germain, 'we used to go when Charles was alive. Why shouldn't we go now? The apples grow just the same. Gilberte won't know what to do with them if we don't pick them. They'll only rot.'

'But yes,' agreed Euphemie.

'And what is more we can give . . .'

Euphemie looked up apprehensively. Sebastien paused at this very delicate moment to pick his teeth.

He went on. 'We can give Gilberte some good advice.'

'But yes,' sighed Euphemie, much relieved.

When the dog-cart drew up in La Chataignerie as it had done for so many years on these annual visits, Lehideux of the Café de Paris came forward, as always, to greet them. Germain jumped down lightly, followed more carefully by Sebastien. The ladies always kept their seats to go on to the farm.

Sebastien at forty-five was beginning to look like Maréchal Joffre in embryo.

In spite of his *embonpoint*, he cut a good figure in his dark blue uniform with his peaked cap and black leather belt and leggings and shoes shining with their high polish.

'But,' exclaimed Lehideux.

Sebastien was wearing a medal—in silver, hanging by a blue ribbon with red and white stripes. He knew that it was this which had called forth Lehideux's exclamation, but he pretended not to be conscious of his astonishment at all. He eased a strap of the horse's harness and called attention loudly to the improvement resulting. Then with enormous geniality——

'Ah, Monsieur Lehideux.'

'But Sebastien, you've got a medal?'

'If he runs that pony strapped up like that again he'll get a sore . . .

A few others from the houses and shops gathered round. Notably Père Lamourette.

'But tell me, Sebastien. What medal is this?'

'Medal?' asked Sebastien. Then at last realizing what they were driving at he added carelessly, 'Oh, that—an English——'

'But—isn't it much of a thing?' demanded Père Lamourette. 'Is it a campaign medal? Do they give it to everybody?'

Sebastien fell into the convenient method employed by Socrates in dialectics.

'Isn't it much of a thing, Monsieur Lamourette? Do you want to insult the English?'

'Certainly I don't want to insult the English,' replied Père Lamourette. 'Far from it.'

'Do they give the French Military Medal to everybody?'

'But, no.'

'Then why do you think the English should give their Military Medal to everybody?'

'But——'

'Do you know that this medal is the highest honour in the British Army?'

'Ah!'

'Do you know that if an English soldier—an English officer, no



matter how high his rank—came down the street now and saw me wearing this medal he'd spring to attention and salute me?

'But no?'

'But yes.'

'A-ah!'

'A-ah.'

To make it easier for his audience he sprang to attention himself and saluted briskly.

'Do you know if an English civilian came along he would raise his hat?' and Sebastien solemnly raised his peaked cap to show how the English civilian would behave.

'But no——'

'But yes.'

'Ah—ah—ah!'

'Ah—ah—ah.'

'Do you know if an English lady saw that medal she'd curtsy?'

Sebastien demonstrated the curtsy by delicately lifting the skirts of his tunic with his finger-tips and bending his knees.

'Ah—ah—ah.'

'Do you know how many of these medals have been won so far?'

'No?'

'Only fifty, and only two have been awarded to Frenchmen. But believe me,' pursued Sebastien whilst his audience listened spellbound. 'To have a medal like that gets on your nerves.'

'But why?'

'But why? Because I've got to wear it all the time.'

'But don't they just wear a ribbon except for special parades?' demanded Père Lamourette.

'Not the English,' replied Sebastien. 'Have you heard of Nelson?'

Yes, they had heard of Nelson.

How did he meet his end?

How?

Because he would wear his medals and everybody could see who he was and fired at him. And since then every Englishman who is awarded a medal wears it always.

'Ah—ah—ah.'

'And wouldn't that get on your nerves always wearing a medal?'

'And if you didn't?'

'And if I didn't! And suppose an Englishman came along and saw I wasn't wearing it? Wouldn't he regard it as an insult to his country? What? You're given the greatest honour that the English can give and you put it in your pocket!'

'Ah—ah!'

Everyone saw now what international significance lay in Sebastien's wearing his medal. English feelings might be so wounded at such an affront that the whole British Expeditionary Force might re-embark, leaving the French to get on with the war.

Monsieur Lehideux got him and Germain across to his café. What would he have? Everyone wanted to pay. Monsieur Lehideux would accept nothing from anyone for the first time in his career as an *estaminet* proprietor. The honours were on him, and Sebastien agreed to toast the medal in a Pernod.

'How did you win it?' piped up a woman's voice.

'How did I win it?' demanded Sebastien. He became suddenly coy.

He bent down so that his questioner could read the words impressed on the silver disc. She failed to make them out so Sebastien read them for her.

'For brav'ry on ze feel of ba-tell! You see brav'ry—that doesn't mean "*brave homme*"—that means "*courage*". Eh?'

'I suppose it's pretty warm up there sometimes?' demanded Père Lamourette.

Sebastien fixed the worthy priest with his little beady eyes and explained with that strict regard to veracity which is the due of a holy father. 'Monsieur,' he said solemnly, 'you have no idea!'

No, no, agreed everyone. One had no idea.

'If this place was up there,' continued Sebastien impressively, 'it wouldn't be here. Just a heap of bricks and rubble.'

'Oh—ah.'

'And you could only tell the church from the rest of the houses because that would be a bigger heap than the others.'

'And the English, Sebastien,' demanded Beaurepaire, 'are they any good?'

Everybody knew he was somewhere on the English front.

'Oh, not bad,' answered Sebastien with a professional air. 'All right on a quiet front when they know they've got our fellows behind them, but they aren't soldiers. They aren't soldiers.'

'Oh—ah.'

'Good fellows, but when it comes to standing up to the Boche—'

Sebastien shook his head as one with authority. •

'Ah—ah.'

They moved back to the trap and got in again.

Monsieur Vellat, a little gentleman who taught music and was

clerk to the mayor, raised his straw boater as the party moved on to the farm.

Here they found much that was disquieting. On the surface perhaps everything looked much as ever. Indeed. . . .

'Damn,' muttered Sebastien as he glanced round the trim yard. 'You wonder what Charles Deschamps ever did when he was home.'

Gilberte could have told him, but he did not ask her. For a hundred jobs now that Charles used to do in a few minutes she had to go off for a man, coax him to come, and feed him when he was here. And in the fields she worked unremittingly from morn to eve.

An unobtrusive first view of the orchard assured Sebastien of a crop of 'Caux's' ample to fill his little bag, and from the house came appetizing smells promising the good meal which Gilberte had always given them. Gilberte herself welcomed them as she always did, with open arms and with unaffected pleasure. Since the last meeting Sebastien's tactless speeches and Euphemie's scratches were all forgotten.

But beneath the surface there was much reason for anxiety. Jules and Marie Thérèse, to begin with, had gone back to school. Obviously Gilberte couldn't keep them at school now and pay their fees. They should have been started off to earn their keep the minute the news of their father's death had arrived. But not only that, not only had Gilberte sent her children back to school, not only had she kept Matthieu on, but she had engaged another labourer—a slim, dark-skinned youth, André, by name, who looked like a Spaniard or Italian.

Matthieu watched the party drive into the yard, neither going up to greet them nor speaking to them when they had dismounted. He gave Sebastien mortal offence by completely ignoring his medal from the start. For all the notice he took of it, for all the deference he paid to his uniform, he might have been a civilian.

The new boy André gave better results, though he was a little disconcerting until Sebastien found how he worked. He was rather like an automatic machine into which you have first to risk a few coppers and which then keeps you in suspense for some seconds before it decides to respond. Eventually—thump, crump, d-zzz—and what you want emerges. So it was with André. After a difficult opening gambit, during which time Sebastien discovered that André had some vague belief in the existence of England, but was quite unaware of Nelson or the part he had played in the destiny of his country, the conversational exchanges began to move, albeit slowly,

along the familiar channels, and in time the farmyard began to resound with the happy braying of the home-coming hero.

'But my old one,' cried Sebastien to the gaping youth, 'do you know that if an Englishman came along here now and he saw me with that medal he'd salute, and I should go like that?'

Sebastien brought his fingers with an artistic carefree movement up to the peak of his cap.

'Non,' gasped André.

Sebastien decided not to waste good hat-raising English civilians and curtsying English ladies on such poor material and went inside, where Gilberte and Anne were bustling with the last preparations for dinner.

'Did Charles get any citations?' he asked innocently.

'Any what?' demanded Gilberte.

'Citations—medals.'

'Not that I've heard of,' said Gilberte.

'Then you can be sure he didn't,' answered Sebastien. 'You would have heard by now.'

Here at any rate was something for the liveliest satisfaction. Charles Deschamps with all his superiority had gone to his grave without even a mention in despatches, whilst he . . .

He glanced down at the Military Medal. His party stirred uneasily. They thought they were in for another disquisition on the idiosyncrasies of Nelson and the behaviour of the English when face to face with Military Medallists.

Real satisfaction, too, Sebastien felt in the contemplation of Anne. 'She won't last much longer,' he mused. 'Before the death of her son she looked good enough for a hundred.' Now she crept about bent and hollow-eyed, as if some massive Hun had beaten her about the head and shoulders with a club and left her prostrate for dead. No, she wouldn't be long for this world, and few things were more gratifying to Sebastien than the contemplation of the imminent departure of an acquaintance for the next world. This one was cracking up but he was going on as strong as ever.

When Gilberte had poured out the coffee the party, with a few self-conscious glances, began to think it was about time they began to proffer that good advice to Gilberte which was one of the prime objects of their coming and which they considered would be a good return for the apples and other unconsidered trifles they would take back with them.

'You won't be able to keep all your fields going, Gilberte?' began Euphemie.

'I may sell some,' said Gilberte.

This was better than Sebastien had expected. He had spent many happy hours since he had heard of the death of Charles Deschamps imagining himself, when he came back to La Chataignerie for his autumn holiday, in the position of honest broker for Gilberte in the business of disposing of her surplus fields. He had even drawn a rough map of her farm and had marked out which fields and meadows he was prepared to sell and which he would keep unless someone came forward with a really substantial offer.

He pictured himself in the Café de Paris on the evening of his arrival letting it be known that Gilberte had placed the disposal of her fields in his hands and that he would be prepared to consider offers. He saw himself the rest of the week courted, flattered and treated by those who would want to buy. As he well knew, of these there would be many. He would be coy as an heiress until his week drew to a close and then he would do business . . . fixing a fair price both for his old acquaintances and for Gilberte, but—for, after all, he was human—bearing in mind those who had appreciated his worth in the past and using the opportunity to bring home to those who had not always done so that they had made a sad mistake.

Old Eugene Rivers, for example, who always saluted him every time he met him as if he were an officer—sometimes six or eight times a day—and who had always wanted that little triangular patch where the road crossed the Creuse on its way to Neuvy. He should have it. Old imbecile. Seven hundred—or, well, take it for six fifty. Madame Boyer too, who always kept back her best cask of cider specially for him—so she said—should have the meadow next her own that she had always coveted. He could not part with it for less than two thousand, or, say, one thousand nine hundred to make the old woman think she had the better of the bargain. As for Camille Sargette, if he thought he would get the field next his yard which he had always wanted after calling him a '*flic*' to his face the last time he was home, he must think gendarmes have an uncommonly short memory. Camille without doubt would be more civil this time and for a week Sebastien would let him imagine that the field was his. On the last day he would find out that it had gone to another. It would be the eternal triangle over again, not this time for love but for a field. The scene which Sebastien anticipated would follow would not fall far below in dramatic intensity the last minutes of many a '*drame passionnel*'.

'I shall be home for a week,' said Sebastien. 'I daresay I could find you some customers.'

'Ah, yes,' answered Gilberte.

'The Great Field, for example,' pursued Sebastien.

'The Great Field?'

'Yes. Now I could sell that . . .'

'To?'

'Beaurepaire.'

'For how much?'

'Two thousand francs.'

'But I got more than two thousand francs' worth of hay from the Great Field this summer alone.'

'You won't get more.'

Gilberte laughed lightheartedly. Little did she suspect the designs Sebastien had been entertaining.

'When I want an agent, my friend, it won't be you, Sebastien,' she asserted tartly. 'You must think I know no more about farming than you do. Sell the Great Field? And where do you think I would get my hay for the winter?'

'Then what are you going to sell?'

'What I feel like selling when someone feels like buying at a fair price: Oh, my poor Sebastien. Don't worry your head. It won't be you who will have the job of selling my fields. So enjoy your holiday with a free mind.'

'But my poor Gilberte,' pleaded Euphemie, 'you can't work all this farm by yourself. Aren't you going to sell anything?'

'Nothing at the moment,' retorted Gilberte.

'Nothing?'

'No.'

'But——'

'And the children——' demanded Euphemie.

'What about them?' asked Gilberte.

'But are they still going to school?'

'Of course.'

'But you can't keep them at school?'

'I'm going to have a good try.'

'But you'll kill yourself.'

'And then?'

'But listen, Gilberte. Why don't you have theftn back with you to help here?'

'Because, please God, they'll earn their living in some other way than as a peasant or a peasant's wife. I've been on the land so long

that I couldn't leave it—I couldn't start anywhere else, but they shall if I can manage it. I won't have them working like mules till they can't work any more and then not a halfpenny from anybody to buy themselves a plate of soup.'

## 21

## A DEBT IS PAID

GILBERTE'S FIERCE RETORT was interrupted by the noise of a heavy wagon lumbering into the yard. It came with a load of artificial fertilizers from Alphonse de la Castellane's mills and with it came the great man himself. Bismarck, the sheep-dog, went out, barking hollowly.

Gilberte followed it to the door.

Monsieur de la Castellane was in the habit of accompanying his men on some of their deliveries to customers he liked. This was his first visit since the death of Charles Deschamps.

Seeing Gilberte at the door Monsieur de la Castellane swept off his broad-brimmed felt with his habitual magnificence of gesture.

'Good day, Monsieur de la Castellane,' said Gilberte.

The arrival of such a distinguished visitor brought the others to their feet. Monsieur de la Castellane greeted them with great affability.

'You will have some coffee, Monsieur?' asked Gilberte.

'Thank you, Madame Deschamps, I will,' replied Monsieur de la Castellane.

He entered and took a chair at the end of the table. He looked at Sebastien's medal. To the latter's disappointment he said merely, 'You are with the English, Sebastien?'

'*Oui, Monsieur de la Castellane,*' replied Sebastien, very simply.

'Better to be allies with the English than to be their enemies,' commented Monsieur de la Castellane.

'*Oui, oui,*' agreed Sebastien, but grudgingly.

'Be assured it is,' replied Monsieur de la Castellane. 'They're tough. The bulldog, eh?'

'Mark you well,' observed Sebastien sagely, with the air of a man who has given much thought before delivering himself. 'If you want to win one of their decorations . . .'

To his great vexation Gilberte cut in here irrelevantly with, 'You

haven't let me have your account for a long time, Monsieur de la Castellane.'

Monsieur de la Castellane was always behindhand with his accounts. Gilberte felt safe in asking for it now. As ever, he would put her off with 'next time'. But instead, to her dismay, he said, 'No, but I can let you have it,' and he pulled out a thin account book from the tail of his coat and began to tot up a page.

Gilberte's heart sank. Since the death of her husband traders who had given her long credit for their bills had been sending them in more promptly. As she could expect, they had not so much faith in the ability of Madame Veuve Deschamps to pay as when Charles was alive. But it grieved her to find Monsieur de la Castellane one of these.

The amount, too, must be large. The account had not been paid for nearly two years. It must be nearly 2,000 francs she owed, and all she had left in the house was a little over 2,000 francs. In a tin box she had two 1,000-franc notes, a 100-franc note, and a few small odds and ends.

Monsieur de la Castellane went steadily on with his addition: February—lime—850, April—seed, green—950, April—potato seed—1,025.

On, on, on, he went. Gilberte sat placidly sipping her coffee. But her heart was in a panic. Would he go over the 2,000? Would she have to say in front of the others, of Sébastien and Euphémie, who were the last persons she would want to know of her extremity, that she hadn't enough money to pay the debt? Providentially Monsieur de la Castellane stopped short at 1,800 francs—an enormous sum. It would leave her with 300 francs to pay Matthieu's and André's wages, to buy the daily bread which they consumed in inordinate quantities, and to meet other expenses which had to be paid cash down.

'1,800,' observed Monsieur de la Castellane. 'These little matters mount up.'

'Yes, yes,' said Gilberte lightly. She opened the wardrobe near her bed and from the layers of sheets she drew out the shallow tin which was her money-box. Except for the two 1,000-franc notes there were only 130 francs. She took out the two notes and placed them on the table in front of Monsieur de la Castellane.

'Thank you, Madame Deschamps,' he said, and with practised flourishes of his pencil he wrote out a receipt and tore it out from his book.

Monsieur de la Castellane had a flair for the histrionic. He rose



and said enigmatically to Gilberte, 'Madame Deschamps, may I trouble you to let us have some wine-glasses?'

The company were silent whilst Gilberte placed the glasses on the table.

From another pocket Monsieur de la Castellane drew a small bottle and held it up to the light. He gazed reverently at the golden colour. '*Messieurs—dames*,' he continued, turning back to the company. 'This is brandy. A historic brandy. I think you will agree when you hear that it was bottled in the year of Austerlitz. I am going to ask you to drink a toast with me. I feel sure you will accord me this favour.'

'In a brandy of Austerlitz,' cried Sebastien. '*Mais très sûr*.'

Monsieur de la Castellane poured out the spirit.

'The toast will be,' he pursued, 'Madame Gilberte Deschamps. For me Madame Gilberte Deschamps will always be the personification of France. Look at the figure of our France on these notes'—he picked up the two 1,000-franc notes still lying on the table—'do you see how like the woman depicted on these to represent our country, our Republic, Madame Deschamps is?' There was indeed a striking resemblance in the regular set features and the defiant eyes.

'It is upon the Madame Deschamps of this our country,' continued Monsieur de la Castellane remorselessly, 'that our future depends. When Charles Deschamps was at home she worked beside him to help him in his farming; when he left to go into the Army she took his place so that the farm would be ready for him when he came back; when he died she stepped into the place he left to carry on alone. She gave her husband without question, without attempting to dissuade him. He and men like him stood between us and the Boche.'

Sebastien rose in protest.

'Monsieur de la Castellane,' he began, 'if you are suggesting that I have been sheltering behind Charles Deschamps and the rest of the soldiers, this medal ought to tell you you are wrong.'

'Whatever that medal tells me, Sebastien Bertrand,' retorted Monsieur de la Castellane firmly, 'it won't tell me what I always knew—that policemen don't go into the front lines.'

'Monsieur de la Castellane,' stormed Sebastien, 'you insult me. If you were forty years younger . . .'

'If I were forty years younger,' replied Monsieur de la Castellane imperturbably, 'you would be a baby in arms and I should be still in my teens. I confess I could wish for nothing more agreeable. No doubt we'd both be better for the transformation. If you don't want

to drink my toast, Sébastien Bertrand, leave it, but I raise my glass to Madame Gilberte Deschamps and the spirit of France——' He drained his glass. Setting it down he continued, 'Madame Deschamps, I ask you to do an old and sincere admirer a supreme favour. I ask you to take these two notes as a tribute to the country I love best and which for me you impersonate.'

So saying he pushed the two 1,000-franc notes in front of Gilberte. Then, gathering up his broad-brimmed felt with a last wide flourish, he bowed to the company with a '*Bonjour, messieurs—dames,*' and was gone.

And suddenly Gilberte, who had received the news of Charles's death without a cry, and ever since had stared defiantly ahead, broke down. She buried her face in her hands and wept.

In silent consternation the others watched her. The two 1,000-franc notes still lay on the table. They were a gift from an outsider to help the widow of Charles Deschamps in her hour of need. All that Sébastien, Germain, Elodie and Euphémie could offer her was 'good advice', which would have reduced her in time to an old woman in a tiny house living on a tethered goat.

They could not add anything to Monsieur de la Castellanc's 2,000 francs. Not a franc. That would have been too small, too farcical. Not 100 francs. That was more than they could bring themselves to afford for all their commerce and their pensions. The fear of the childless middle-aged was upon them. They must save, save, save, to be sure of something when the evening of life drew on.

Besides they had invested large sums in Russia, particularly Germain and Euphémie, attracted by the high rate of interest. Now the chances of ever recovering their capital were becoming more and more remote. They spoke darkly of their Russian investments, but they had more money in Germany than they had in Russia, for Germany, never intending to repay, could afford to offer better terms. Of their German ventures they said no word.

Germain himself wept a little. He was genuinely attached to his sister, but he dared not help her. He was hopelessly dominated by his frog-faced wife. In his most venturesome moments he had thought of a furious rebellion. He would declare himself in favour of providing Marie Thérèse and Jules with their clothes until they commenced to earn their own living. But he came down to earth with a rude jolt when he found Euphémie's bulging eyes and moist, parted lips confronting him.

Sébastien spent his week at La Chataignerie—not only in exhibiting his medal but in exposing the wounds which Monsieur de la

Castellane had so gratuitously inflicted upon him. The folk around had now not only to listen to the hat-raising and arm-presenting effect of his medal upon the English, but had to be terrorized by the possibility of the consequences should it come to their ears that a Frenchman had so grossly insulted their most prized distinction. International complications were as certain as to-morrow's sun and, indeed, for all Sebastien knew droll things were happening even at the moment. He would not have been in the least surprised if upon opening the 'Good Man of Limousin' midweek he learned that the English in an unappeasable mass were making for Calais and Boulogne.

It would have been politic with such tremendous issues depending upon it if Sebastien, in the interests of France, had swallowed Monsieur de la Castellane's insults in silence and so reduced as far as he was able the chances of reports of the incident reaching the ears of the English for whose susceptibility he was so concerned. But this consideration did not appear to have occurred to Sebastien and he went about the *département* braying about his medal, its significance, and how much hung upon the deference paid to him and it by his fellow-countrymen.

To do Monsieur de la Castellane justice it must be admitted that Sebastien had never spent an hour in the front line. Indeed, an historian careful for the propagation of the truth would have had to record that the medal had not been won in the ordinary sense that medals are won at all. But that was not Sebastien's fault. The decoration was awarded for the very good reason that had Sebastien been called upon in an emergency he would have displayed as much courage to deserve this coveted recognition as had ever been shown to win it, so why deprive him of a reward which he would certainly have earned—for physically he was no coward—just because nothing happened where he was to give him a chance to gain it?

Sebastien had been selected from his comrades to represent the Republic at a chateau behind Arras where an important English general had taken up his headquarters. His duty was to keep undesirable French civilians at a distance from the chateau. Had the occasion called for it Sebastien would have barred the way with his body and would have been trampled to death rather than allow any unauthorized person to intrude. But the occasion never did call for it. The only civilians who came near the chateau were a young girl who brought the morning papers at ten, and an elderly postman who came with the letters any time between midday and sunset.

This important general had a sardonic humour and a shocking

digestion. In the mornings whilst his satellites were gorging themselves with bacon and marmalade he would come round and seek compensation in an exchange with Sebastien. The contrast in the two men could not have been greater—Sebastien, stout, much the shorter of the two men, spick and span, rigidly at attention, addressing the general in a respectful, voluminous and heavy French which he relished more than the breakfasts he had to go without; the general, tall, thin, monocled, with his clothes hanging shapelessly from his shoulders as they would from a coat-hanger. One day it suddenly occurred to him that in recommending awards submitted to him by others he might for once make one himself. Thus was Sebastien decorated. 'This is the highest award I can confer on you,' observed the general. Then he himself pinned the medal to Sebastien's substantial chest and upon this cryptic remark Sebastien built up his recital of the tribute paid to wearers of the medal by the English. Had the recital come to the ears of the general he would probably have rated its entertainment value at least high enough to add a bar.

One consolation people like Monsieur de la Castellane could not take from him. He had his medal whilst Charles Deschamps was dead without even a 'citation'. Mars had not thought him worth an honourable mention. Deschamps had never concealed his contempt for him and now, for all Charles's conceit and cleverness, he had won a medal and Deschamps had done nothing and was dead. 'Curious,' was Sebastien's favourite comment when he pointed out this unexpected turn of events to his friends. 'There he was and he did nothing. As for me——' His eyes would fall modestly to the medal on his breast.

To be just to Charles Deschamps it was not quite fair to say he had done nothing. He shared death with some half-dozen Brandenburgers and an old Frenchwoman.

In May his division took up a position in the line south of the Somme ready to take a share in the big attack the English were to make. The Germans seemed fully aware of what was coming and most disconcertingly in mid-June took possession with a sudden sally of some French outposts on the crest of a ridge giving them an excellent view of the valley stretching back below which the French forces would have to come up.

At all costs the crest had to be recovered, and Deschamps's battalion was given the task. The attack was an unqualified success, as attacks had a way of being, on two-thirds of the front. But on the left third, the highest and the most important part of the ridge, it

was held up by one strongly entrenched German machine-gun post. Sergeant Deschamps found himself with some of his men pinned to the earth by the fire of the gun. The sound of the detonation of its charges was so loud that it seemed it was firing almost over their heads and its droves of bullets sang through the air like flights of heavy bees. Charles knew the gun must be very close to him. Then it began firing in another direction, to the centre and right of the French line, cutting down the reserves as they moved up.

Charles slowly, very slowly, raised his head and was amazed to see hardly fifteen yards from him, behind the remnants of a hawthorn hedge, the German gun team—some six in all—working their gun for all it was worth. Like them Charles had an excellent view of the rest of the attack. The gun was doing deadly execution, and the Germans were so absorbed in their work that they had no thoughts for anything else. Tat—tat—tat—tat—tat went the deadly sewing-machine of the modern Moloch and each time down went a score or so of blue-coated figures on the opposite slope. How much more effective it was than poor old-fashioned Atropos with her scissors.

'Wait,' whispered Charles Deschamps to his men, and hardly knowing what he was doing he quietly crept forward, hidden by the hawthorn. Any noise he may have made was deadened by the firing of the gun. In his right hand he held a revolver; in his left a grenade. When he reached the hawthorn one of the gun team saw him, but Charles was now not four yards away and five shots from the revolver killed four of the Germans outright. A fifth jumped to his feet. Charles knocked him down with a heavy blow from the grenade used as if it had been a truncheon; the sixth burst into tears and threw up his hands.

Charles's colonel sought him out personally a few days later. He called him 'my son', caught him by both hands, and kissed him on both cheeks.

'Choose which you will have,' he told Charles, 'the Legion of Honour or be promoted lieutenant.'

Charles had no hesitation. He was too grown a man to be much hankering after coloured ribbon. If he was a lieutenant and was killed, Gilberte would get a pension. If he lived, out of his pay he would be able to send her something month by month.

'A lieutenant,' said Charles simply.

In a month the papers came through. Charles was to go back to Beauvais for his commission and further orders.

He started back at once, quitting the shell-torn village in which his battalion had its headquarters one hot sunny afternoon in mid-July. He decided not to take the main road back to Beauvais but another which half a mile out of the village led to the farm of Madame Denain. The farm was the centre of three or four other houses but everyone else had gone, and so too would Madame Denain if the French gendarmes could have forced her to go. Twice they had carted her out by physical force but she had always come back, and now they had left her to whatever fate she was destined—possibly the nearest French civilian to the German lines on the Somme front; fat, septuagenarian, with bold, laughing, challenging eyes and a sharp, mocking tongue. Shells in plenty had fallen in and around her farm. So far she had never been touched. But her buildings had been hit and she had had some narrow escapes.

She kept goats and rabbits and could be relied upon for omelettes, eggs and '*civets*'. She and Charles became great friends when the battalion occupied the support trenches two hundred yards in front of the farm. Charles determined to say good-bye to her.

The afternoon was perfectly peaceful—not a sound of firing on either side of the miles of embattled trenches from north to south. Then when Charles was not a hundred yards from the farm he heard a dull thud—which he knew was the detonation of a charge of a German gun. Suddenly through the air overhead passed the sound of an invisible flight. A spurt of grey smoke billowed up in the middle of Madame Denain's farm and then hung above it like a bundle of discoloured yellow fleeces. He thought he heard a cry, and ran towards the house. The Boche at last had hit the mark—the living-room of the farm was in ruins, and from within came the cries of a woman buried beneath. Charles rushed towards her. It was Madame Denain. He found her lying on the floor, still very much alive but pinned down by a great century-blackened rafter from the ceiling of the room. Charles began to struggle with the rafter. The quiet of the late summer afternoon was broken by another distant thud, so scarcely perceptible that anyone who did not know there was a war on would never have noticed it. Another invisible flight arched its way through the air and crashed again in the living-room, falling almost on the same spot as its predecessor, contrary to all the rules of shell fire on which Charles with some justification had relied. Pieces of Madame Denain were discovered but nothing of Charles. Why he had not turned up at Beauvais was one of the minor mysteries of the Somme campaign. No one knew of his intention to say good-bye to Madame Denain.

## DISCOVERY OF THE ENGLISH

A MILD SUNNY AFTERNOON in November. A small crowd of belated English tourists and holiday-makers was waiting on a quayside at Boulogne. In their midst stood a slender, solitary, forlorn-looking figure. It was none other than our Marie Thérèse. She looked round at the English *en masse*, to meet whom she had worked so hard and thought so much for so long. Percy Bysshe Shelley was not among them; not even poor apothecary Keats or the far less spiritual Byron. Even the inevitable clergyman did not look a bit like Wordsworth.

They were all shapes and all sizes, with one thing in common. They all wore crumpled and dirty mackintoshes, the more expensive of them seemingly enjoying the distinction of possessing the dirtiest and most crumpled. Marie Thérèse looked round her in dismay. She had never seen such a prosaic assembly in her life. Yet these were the people who had filled so many books with such marvellous music and poetry.

The first Armistice day was almost exactly twelve months ago. English and French had already set out on their divergent ways; the English to assume that their intervention on the continent had settled everything for the next hundred years as it had done a century before; the French, knowing the Teuton better after having him for so long as their neighbour, to ponder when the next onslaught would come, and to speculate whether it was worth while attempting to oppose it.

No one to-day, however, thought of another war. Certainly not the group of English voyagers awaiting repatriation on the quayside. How they would have laughed if anyone had told them that before scarce another twenty years had gone a son of their King would be wounded by a German bomb in one of the big hotels looking out to sea and that the flower of the German youth would be diving on this little harbour in determined attempts to sink the hospital ships as slowly they edged out between the narrow quays.

Indeed one of the hospital ships they were to attack might have been the competent-looking little craft that now came surging in between the piers at the harbour entrance. She came to a stop opposite the group some dozen yards out and then, vibrating with con-

strained energy, began to draw inch by inch sideways into the quay.

A solitary traveller on the deck caught the attention of Marie Thérèse. He was waving violently; at first she thought, in alarm, at her. He was in regulation English uniform—dirty mackintosh, with camera slung over his shoulders, and plus-fours, heather-coloured—one leg tight to the knees, the other down on his boot top.

'But he's a comedian,' protested Marie Thérèse.

He began to shout.

'M-awthar sends her l-ah-ah-ve.'

'Thanks,' shouted a shrill voice next to Marie Thérèse, owned by a sallow-faced thick-set young woman.

'Dad sends his l-ah-ah-ve too,' shouted the young man.

'Thanks,' replied the young woman but without enthusiasm.

'Uncle Joe sends his l-ah-ah-ve too,' pursued the youth.

'Thanks.'

'And Aunty Nell.'

'Thanks.'

'And Mrs. Edwards sends her kindest regards.'

'Thanks.'

'Oh, and la-ah-ah-ve from Mrs. Murdoch.'

'Thanks.'

'Surprising that, isn't it?'

'Yes.'

L-ah-ah-ve?

What was 'l-ah-ah-ve'? Marie Thérèse had a moment of panic. Had she set out for the wrong country, or had she learnt the wrong language, or was the English she had learnt quite different from the English spoken by the natives?

Then she guessed the young man's meaning. 'Love'! All these people were sending the thick-set impassive young woman their love, and the delivering of all this pent-up passion could not wait until the ship was safe alongside.

Marie Thérèse's sense of modesty was shocked. Did these English folk who wrote such wonderful poems on love bandy it about like this young man?

On deck Marie Thérèse found a seat. Next to her sat a young woman in a check suit which hurt the eye. Her mouth pouted sulkily, and her eyes bulged like an outraged cod. She talked in a loud voice. The words came out in a series of explosions—like corks from a pop-gun. To her horror Marie Thérèse could understand



hardly anything she said. She had been in Germany in 'Septumbah'. 'I thought they said "September",' mused Marie Thérèse in dismay. Had she been taught the English pronunciation all wrong?

'I spent Septumbah in Jahmonny,' the woman announced, 'such perfect people. Perfectly charming. Why did we fight them? From the moment I crossed the bawdah I felt perfectly at home with them: want to do everything they can to help you. Shatteringly decent, don't you know. Can't do too much for you. . . .

'The French. You never came across such downright robbers in your life. And hopeless as soldiers. My cousin Eustace—he's a captain in the Lahnsahs—says if we ever have another wah with the French on our side he'll resign—simply impossible, my deah. You simply can't rely on 'em at all. . . .

'And such robbers. Positive thieves. The moment they see an English person they think he's fair game. Perfectly monstrous the prices they ask. Only yesterday I went into Lafayettes for a Kwat. Nothing under 800 francs. I ask you—a Kwat—800 francs.'

Marie Thérèse asked herself too—a Kwat—what in the world is a Kwat?

The pop-gun eased up a minute as a sailing vessel was passing.

'Where is she going?' demanded the pop-gunner of a deckhand.

'Dunkirk, lady,' he replied.

'Dunkirk—never heard of it.'

'Over that way, ma'am.'

'Beastly hole, I'll be bound.'

The deckhand looked hurt.

'It isn't too bad, ma'am. Got some nice beaches.'

Half an hour out from Boulogne, Marie Thérèse went to the front of the ship, as she would have called it, to see if she could catch a glimpse of this England to which she had for so long felt drawn. The French coast was by now a darkening frown. There was no sign of anything ahead. To the west the sun had become a white disc.

The speed of the ship slackened. A pale mist began to shut her in. Now and again the ship's siren made her jump as it rent the air and answering came the sounds of other sirens to left or right.

Suddenly a grey sea wall towered up above them. They were entering Folkestone. Sea mist and the gathering dark hid the town and the countryside through which the London train hurried her.

It stopped at last in a dark, yawning, smoke-filled cavern. Everyone got out. So did Marie Thérèse. Peering through the dim yellow light overhead she asked a passing porter, 'Ees thees Veectoria?'

'Victoria, miss,' said the porter and hurried on.

Almost ill with fright and home-sickness Marie Thérèse could not move from the spot. What they had told her of English fogs was true after all. A longing to go back home seized her.

Out of the darkness a pale-faced woman emerged.

'Arr you Mademoiselle Deschamps?' she asked pleasantly, in what Marie Thérèse was afterwards to learn was a Scottish accent.

'Are you Mrs. Parkes?'

'I am,' laughed pleasant, Scottish Mrs. Parkes.

## 23

### POET AND PEASANT

NOT UNTIL Marie Thérèse had been nearly twelve months in England did she meet a poet. Even then he turned out to be only a minor poet and with suicidal tendencies.

Like Marie Thérèse, Mr. Horace Gibson was attending a series of lectures on Victorian literature. They were delivered on twenty-six Friday afternoons at the top of a building off Fleet Street. Gibson's chronic inattention and restlessness so disturbed the lecturer and those around him that he brought him out to the desk in the middle of the front row, and thus for the rest of the term his red ears, his thick ill-fitting lips, his pale thin cheeks and his shock of mouse-coloured hair formed the centre of Marie Thérèse's outlook during these lectures, for Horace's desk was immediately in front of hers.

There was nothing about him to make one suspect the poet beneath his cheap sports jacket and his shabby flannels. He was shortish and thin, and his head was far too big for his neck and body. Marie Thérèse would have paid no more attention to him than to any other of the youths of his class but one could not sit near Horace without becoming acquainted.

He dropped his rubber under Marie Thérèse's table and borrowed a pencil which he forgot to hand back the first time he sat in front of her. He wrote a treatise on a subject which was not set at the following lecture and failed to find time to write one at all for the third. All this Marie Thérèse had to listen to, and most earnestly did she endeavour by good advice to help him to be more punctual and attentive. And then the darker side of Mr. Gibson's nature came to

the surface. He deplored the substance of the lectures. The lecturer told them that Dickens was a great novelist and that he had attacked many of the social evils of his day, that Charles Reade had helped in prison reform, and that Benjamin Disraeli's political ambitions were reflected in his novels.

'That we should have to listen to such elementary tripe,' stormed Horace.

'Tripe?' demanded Marie Thérèse, whose inability to let an English word or phrase pass uncomprehended was now habitual.

'Balderdash,' substituted Horace, and hurried on. He had expected something of the psychological and ethical influence of the great Victorian writers on society and had to submit to this.

He found in Marie Thérèse a good if perplexed and anxious listener, and he asked her to tea in a café. She accepted dubiously, fearful lest he should spend money on her which he could ill afford. Happily, however, in expounding his views on the riddle of the universe he did not notice the bill which the waitress had laid on the counter, nor Marie Thérèse pick it up, nor that she paid it. For some weeks after that they had tea regularly before Marie Thérèse set off back to Mrs. Parkes at Putney, and Horace for the Holloway Road. To be fair he sometimes did come back to earth early enough to take a turn at paying the bill.

It was in this hot and overcrowded tea-shop that Marie Thérèse learnt that Horace was a poet. Whatever pleasure the discovery gave her was destroyed by the almost simultaneous discovery that he often brooded over the pros and cons of suicide, particularly the pros.

He produced two sonnets for her delectation, one finished and one unfinished, the last two lines obstinately refusing to get written. They were pregnant works in which Horace described his ill-treatment at the hands of a latter-day dark lady and whose memory after——

'I have crossed the great divide  
Shall be as yonder sycomyme to me.'

'What's a sycomyme?' asked Marie Thérèse.

'It's a poetic word for sycamore,' explained Horace.

'I like sycamore best,' ventured Marie Thérèse.

'That shows you've no poetic sense,' snapped Horace.

But his great aim in life was not to write poetry. That was a side-line. He had a theory on which to rebuild the world. All our troubles, according to Horace, lay in the fact that we were unable

to de-emotionalize our thoughts. He preached the rational simplification of mankind's outlook upon the cosmos, only varying his message at times to urge 'the simplification of rationalization'. Though he could never get to class punctually, though he could never get his written work finished in time, though one in four of his buttons was missing, and the rest looked ready to drop off, though he rarely possessed or used a handkerchief, and though in short he mismanaged his own small life to an extraordinary degree, the task of pulling the world to pieces and putting it together, leaving it better and happier than it had ever been before, did not daunt him in the least. Indeed, he thought that was his life's mission and because the world so far had shown not the slightest inclination to submit itself to his reformatory hands, Horace now went about with an embittered smile and a cynical commentary. He talked darkly of the possibilities of the domestic gas cooker until Marie Thérèse's eyes bulged and she began to wonder whether she ought not to remain with him until his desperate mood was over.

Hardly a Friday passed but Horace gave Marie Thérèse to think that the coming week-end would be his last on earth, and it seriously interfered with her work. How could one estimate the effect of William Makepeace Thackeray on the English novel when a fellow-sojourner on this troubled sphere was perhaps at this very minute fitting a rather large and awkwardly shaped head into a gas oven? How write engagingly upon the Trollopian atmosphere of the Barchester novels when all the time it made one think of a kitchen in Holloway with the air full of noisome fumes?

However, despite his Friday evening threats, Horace happily always did turn up the next week, although so late sometimes that the earnest anxious soul of Marie Thérèse told her that this time he must have done it. Towards the end of the course Horace made her a curious proposal. It set Marie Thérèse's heart thumping with horror at first for she thought he was suggesting that she should join him in a suicide pact. She found to her relief that it was nothing more than that they should set up house together, which meant that they should take a bed-sitting-room where, as a reward for not troubling her with the vexations and conventional formalities of marriage, Marie Thérèse would see to his clothes, his cooking, his university papers, leaving him to get on with his poetry and the rational simplification of de-emotionalism.

Marie Thérèse's relief at discovering that what she had supposed was a suicide pact was in truth an invitation to the joys of *La Vie*

Bohème in a double-bedroom off the Holloway Road was expressed in one of her rare laughs. She checked her laughter but she could not shut out the merriment which lit up her eyes.

'*Non, non, monsieur,*' protested Marie Thérèse.

'You are as convention-ridden, as bourgeois, as any English miss brought up in a double-fronted villa in suburbia,' retorted Horace. All the bitterness of his life came back into his eyes again.

However, on the whole, he took it very well. He contented himself with observing, 'I thought that would appeal to a French girl.'

Came their last evening together.

They had reached the last lecture and the parting of the ways. Hardy was on the operating table. After it they would go their separate ways. It would be some other young woman's turn to be tortured with the anticipation of Horace's approaching suicide.

Coming out of the lecture room which the lecturer had filled with a Dorset atmosphere of yawning graves, tombstones, black flags and churches at midnight, they took refuge from a cold, wet, bleary-eyed Fleet Street in the tea-shop for the last time.

Mr. Gibson, as always, fulminated against the lecturer. 'There's nothing demographic about him,' he complained. 'What you want is a man who can explain why a hundred years ago this country produced Dickens, and to-day produces H. G. Wells and worse. Unless somebody comes along who can explain that and quick—this country is done! Done!'

No one hurried forward to save the country. A patient, humble-souled man, probably a messenger from one of the newspaper offices, had taken a seat opposite them and watched Horace's gesticulations with anxiety. Horace thought he had won an audience and continued.

In a pause for breath, the humble auditor leaned forward. He said, 'Your spoon is in your cup, sir. If it gets upset I'm afraid I'll cop it.'

In silent contempt Horace removed the spoon and ignored his interrupter.

Marie Thérèse, to help ease things, smiled at him encouragingly.

'Dessay it's all right for the guv'nor,' explained the other, as apologetic as ever, 'but I got only one pair of trawsees.'

'Trawsees?' demanded Marie Thérèse.

'Yus,' pursued the stranger, laughing, 'what ee wears and what you don't.'

He got up to go, and Marie Thérèse turned her questioning eyes to Horace.

'He means trahsahs,' he explained disgustedly, pulling at his own, when even this elucidation had failed.

He looked sourly at Marie Thérèse. More than ever he saw how very good she was to look at. He resolved to make one last effort to appeal to all that was worth while in her to save her from the bourgeois mediocrity and dullness which threatened to engulf her.

'We've got a big do at the Communist Club to-morrow evening, big debate and then a dance,' he told her. 'Care to come?'

'Where is it?'

'Highgate.'

'How should I get back to Putney?' demanded Marie Thérèse.

'Oh,' replied Horace lightly, 'you could come back with me. Spend the week-end with me if you like.'

He answered the questions which Marie Thérèse was too astonished to put into words.

'My landlady is very broad-minded,' said Horace.

'And you, Monsieur Gibson, are you very broad-minded?'

He nodded.

'And you?'

'I'm sorry, I'm not,' laughed Marie Thérèse.

She followed his hunched figure out. In his bitterness and disillusionment once more he had forgotten the bill. Marie Thérèse paid, but Horace very gallantly saw her board the bus for Putney. But he did not bother to raise his hat when she looked back and saw him for the last time.

## 24

### *TWELFTH NIGHT*

**J**UST AT ABOUT the time when the twenty-sixth and last lecture on the English prose writers of the nineteenth century was about to be delivered, when the first sharp chills of October had strewn the London roads with yellow and brown leaves, when flickering glows on the curtained windows as Marie Thérèse made her way home showed that these comfort-loving English had already started winter fires, and when appetizing smells betrayed that even amongst the well-to-do villa dwellers of Putney there were some ready to risk their social standing for the delights of tea with fried herrings, just at about this time John Wesley Treleaven rang

up Mrs. Parkes to ask if Mr. Parkes had Hodgkinson on Subsidence, and if he could borrow it.

'I don't know,' said Mrs. Parkes, 'Richard isn't in. You'd better come and see for yourself.'

Treleaven was a young engineer, one of a number employed by the partners of a well-known London firm. Mr. Parkes was a surveyor of standing and had a vast library of books, browsing amongst which Treleaven had often spent an evening.

'I'll come round right away,' said Treleaven.

'Yes, do,' said Mrs. Parkes and promptly disappeared, so that he was received ten minutes later not by her, as he expected, but by a perturbed Marie Thérèse who had never seen him before, knew nothing of the reason for his coming, and who could not think why Mrs. Parkes had chosen this moment to disappear.

They stood facing each other on opposite sides of the breakfast-room table.

'Er——' began Treleaven, taking it for granted that Marie Thérèse would know he had come to borrow Hodgkinson on Subsidence.

Marie Thérèse wondered whether he was one of those unhappy men about whom Mr. Parkes expressed himself so forcefully from time to time as 'one of those damned young pups who bowl into one's house any time between five and midnight and tell you you'll be dead in no time and you'd better buy one of their blasted insurances unless you want your missis to go charring for the rest of her days'.

Treleaven got no further than his preliminary 'er'. Marie Thérèse's English suddenly went. She could have said something trite in French but not a word of English came to her rescue.

She felt Treleaven's gaze upon her and could only reply with an occasional shy glance at him. But whereas Treleaven could have given no more informing description of Marie Thérèse than to say that she was an engaging little person—of about average height, anyway, shorter than himself—Marie Thérèse had noticed that Treleaven had steady grey eyes, a quite shapely nose, fair hair, was tall and broad, and generally was a young man whom a young woman—herself, say—could talk about and confess him as her husband without undue embarrassment or apology.

'This must be that French girl that Parkes was telling me about,' thought Treleaven, with an unprecedented flash of intuition.

'Did you come to see Mrs. Parkes?' asked the French girl. 'I do not know where she has gone. I will see. . . .'

'It's all right,' replied Treleaven. 'I just came to see if Mr. Parkes had a book. I asked Mrs. Parkes about it on the phone.'

'She was here just a minute ago——'

Another pause which was broken only by the appearance of Mrs. Parkes herself.

'Good evening, Mr. Treleaven,' she said. 'Have you found your book? Oh, by the way, have you met Mademoiselle?'

'Are you going back to France at Christmas?' asked Treleaven.

'I do not think so,' answered Marie Thérèse.

'She's been here nearly a year,' put in Mrs. Parkes. 'She's afraid if she goes back she'll never get the fare to come over again so she does what Scotsmen do who want to get educated—earns a little money between terms. You English charge her so many francs for your beastly pounds that she can't afford to go home.'

'I see,' said Treleaven. 'You're going to take a degree in English?'

'Yes,' answered Marie Thérèse, 'and English literature.'

'She reads Shakespeare, John,' said Mrs. Parkes.

'Good God, no,' exclaimed Treleaven with unfeigned concern.

'But do not you, Mr. Treleaven?' asked Marie Thérèse.

'What, Shakespeare?' demanded Treleaven. 'No fear. That's that stuff in the red books. We did two plays at school—*Henry V*, and I forget what the other was. Something, I know. I was bored stiff. All full of notes about what this word meant and what that word meant. Awful stuff.'

'You have never been to see a Shakespearean play?' asked Marie Thérèse.

'No fear. Ugh!' replied Treleaven stoutly.

'Then it's time that you did,' said Mrs. Parkes. 'Shakespeare isn't a red book written by a Cambridge don and poisoned with his notes. It's a play with real people walking about. And Mam'selle is dying to see one. You'd better take her. She'll never have enough of your pounds to afford to go herself. What are you doing to-night?'

'Nothing,' added Treleaven, and looked speculatively at Marie Thérèse, who was not quite following the plot.

Mrs. Parkes took up the *Telegraph*.

'Here you are. There's *Twelfth Night* at the Old Vic to-night. Why don't you take her?'

'Oh, but Mrs. Parkes,' protested Marie Thérèse.

'We'd better eat something. . . .' said Treleaven.

'Yes, that's right,' retorted Mrs. Parkes. 'Dress, and then wolf



until you make yourself comatose. Nobody could put up with the stuff they show in the West End unless he'd drugged himself with solid English pudding first. You don't need to feed before going to the Old Vic. You go there fasting so that you miss nothing. At the interval you go to the back and get a sausage roll and tea in a huge mug with sides as thick as a mushroom.'

'Oh, yes,' exclaimed Marie Thérèse. 'We will do that.'

When the orchestra began the first incidental music and the sudden darkening of the theatre hushed the laughing, chattering audience, Marie Thérèse could hardly contain herself. It was a great moment. She was going to see Shakespeare in English, in England, played not a mile from 'The Globe' where Shakespeare himself had played and where his plays had first been performed.

Treleaven sat back resignedly, but he found no small satisfaction in gazing for the first time objectively at Marie Thérèse, who had no eyes except for the curtain. She had slipped off her coat and sat forward as if to get as near as possible to the stage. Her small hands were clasped tensely in her lap, and Treleaven noticed the slender shoulders and her small shapely head poised on a delicate white neck. Under a silk blouse was the suggestion of firm shapely arms. And there was too a faint perfume of violet, exquisitely pleasing until later in the evening he discovered beyond a peradventure that it came from a fat red-faced lady sitting on his right.

At last the curtain swept upwards and the same unseen hands at the same moment removed from Treleaven's mind the belief that Shakespeare was a red book stuffed with the dusty grubbings of generations of pedants who, like an army of death watch beetles, had burrowed into the massive Tudor oak until most of their countrymen confused their excavations with the original structure.

Treleaven was entranced from the first; so, too, was Marie Thérèse. So, too, the packed audience. They laughed as English audiences always have done at the rogueries of Sir Toby and the out-witted Sir Andrew, the unpopular Puritanism of Malvolio, and held their breath as the fates of the lovers were skilfully woven into the symmetrical pattern by the master-hand.

At the interval Marie Thérèse put her hand into Treleaven's and said, 'We must have a sausage roll and tea.'

Everybody, it seemed, was having sausage rolls and tea. Marie Thérèse looked round at the sea of English faces, laughing at the good fun of the comedy. English people like them had laughed at it for three centuries and would laugh for generations yet, unless the activities of the university dons took a turn for the worse and

completely covered the original structure with their excretions. Then Marie Thérèse saw what Shakespeare meant to the English. He spoke for these people round her in their short skirts, flannels, and sports jackets as much as for the Elizabethans with their velvets and ruffles. He was the eternal English. As long as England existed they would be using his phrases, nearly always unwittingly, thinking of life and its problems as he thought of them, standing up resolutely for what they considered to be their own rights and never dreaming for a moment that any other country could be as good as theirs—'this sceptred isle'. How well those few lines expressed their conviction that nowhere in the world was there a country to compare with their own, their isolationism, their valiant determination 'come the four corners of the world in arms' never to lie at the foot of a proud conqueror.

'*Midsummer Night's Dream* next week,' said Treleaven, as he helped Marie Thérèse on with her coat. 'Would you like to come to that?'

'We will see.' Marie Thérèse thought that was the appropriate modest remark to make.

'Is it any good?' asked Treleaven.

'It is awful in French,' said Marie Thérèse.

In the train after Clapham Junction they had the compartment to themselves.

'I suppose you'll go back to France,' observed Treleaven, 'after—after you've finished your studies.'

'I suppose so,' agreed Marie Thérèse.

'You'll live in France, of course,' pursued Treleaven.

'Well, I suppose it all depends where my husband lives,' answered Marie Thérèse.

'Husband?' echoed Treleaven. 'Are you married?'

'No,' said Marie Thérèse, 'but—I suppose I shall be one day.'

Meeting her earnest eyes for a moment and looking down at her trim figure, Treleaven thought it very likely that one day she would have a husband.

They were silent until they got out at Putney. Treleaven took her arm as they walked through the deserted streets. When they reached Mr. Parkes's villa Treleaven muttered, 'Don't need to go in for a minute—come along to the end.'

They walked farther along the road where the villas gave way to the green hedges of a nurseryman's grounds which had been isolated by the swelling tide of suburban building.

The hunter's moon, nearly at the full, looked down earthward

with the bored aloofness of a conductor watching an opera moving along to its climax for the thousandth performance.

'Well——' murmured Treleven. He gathered her hands in his.

Marie Thérèse tried to think of some polite phrases to thank him for this evening of sparkle and colour on Bankside.

Treleven broke the silence again.

'If you aren't married,' he asked, 'how about marrying me?'

Marie Thérèse gave a start at the words, nearly freeing herself from his arms. There was nothing feigned about the astonishment which revealed itself in her startled, wide-open eyes.

'But Mr. Treleven,' she exclaimed, 'you have only known me since half past six.'

'What does that matter?' demanded Treleven.

'Mais——'

'May?' echoed Treleven, puzzled. He had left French behind him with Shakespeare and many other accomplishments when he had quitted school at eighteen to concentrate on becoming an engineer. "'May", what does that mean?'

But Marie Thérèse was too shocked to answer. She was shocked beyond words, far more shocked at this offer of lawful wedded matrimony than when Mr. Horace Gibson had offered to share a room with her in sin at Finsbury Park. Never had she heard of such recklessness. Here was a young man of good healthy stock, upon whom his parents had no doubt spent a great deal to educate and launch him upon a career, asking a woman to marry him whom he had met but a few hours before without making the slightest inquiry first about her family or her past. For all he knew there might have been a history of alcoholism, insanity, or tuberculosis, or indeed of all three. Being the good sensible Frenchwoman she was and knowing how Nature had made 'the Messieurs', she understood Horace's importunings perfectly and could refuse them with twinkling eyes, but this Anglo-Saxon recklessness which would bind a man body and soul to an unknown woman for the rest of his days left her speechless with astonishment.

'What's your name anyway?' demanded Treleven.

'Marie Thérèse.'

'Marie Thérèse? Er—are you Catholic?'

'I do not know. I suppose I am. Er—does that matter?'

Treleven thought for a minute, meeting the eyes fixed steadfastly upon his.

'No,' he answered doggedly. 'It doesn't matter.'

'What is your religion?' asked Marie Thérèse.

'Wesleyan,' replied Treleaven.

He felt her body start in his arms at the word.

'A what?' she demanded earnestly.

'A Wesleyan.'

'What is a Wesleyan?'

Not once but many times was Treleaven to find most disconcerting Marie Thérèse's inability, no matter what the occasion or the circumstances, ever to allow an unknown English word or phrase to pass by without chasing it to earth and pinning it carefully into her vocabulary.

'A Wesleyan,' muttered Treleaven, 'well,—it's a Nonconformist.'

Another start.

'A what?'

He forced her head back on to his shoulder and tightened his arms around her.

'Hang it all,' he growled. 'Do you think I'm going to explain all this damned religious nonsense to-night?'

Next day he took her to Evensong at St. Paul's, regarding that as a fair religious 'No-man's-land'.

## 25

### 'OUI, MONSIEUR LE MAIRE!'

MARIE THÉRÈSE and John Treleaven were married at Billancourt-sur-Seine, about twelve months to the day after they had met at Mrs. Parkes's. For one thing Marie Thérèse had to be in Paris for her final examinations, and for another at Billancourt, on the western edges of the city, her brother Jules was now living with a Mrs. Jules, and was engaged as an engineer in the great Renault factories.

L'Anglais had been unexpectedly difficult about the wedding and had expressed the most subversive views about the manner in which the contract should be solemnized. Marie Thérèse had taken it for granted that the ceremony would be the usual modest little affair in a Roman Catholic church after the civic ceremony at the Town Hall, but Treleaven, with five to ten generations of Cornish Nonconformity behind him, had flatly refused to submit to the ministrations of a Roman priest and, as Marie Thérèse now wanted to marry him as much as he wanted to marry her, she agreed to be content with the ceremony at the Town Hall.

Jules and Mrs. Jules had taken a flat in a block south of the river. Mrs. Jules was a tall gaunt woman ten years older than her husband, who went driving about hurriedly with her head and shoulders forward as though her legs would never get her where she wanted to go soon enough. Her black restless eyes, so disturbing with their unending darting and searching glances, accentuated the pallor of her thin face. She was ridden with ambition. Somewhere here in their midst Renault, in a shed in a back garden, had started the motor factory which now spread round them on either bank and had completely covered a pretty island like Eel Pie Island at Richmond. Jules was to do the same. She yearned and slaved for the day when he would give up working for another man and start a business of his own. Gradually together they would work it up, starting, if need be, as humbly as Renault himself had started. Gradually they would become rich and powerful. Mrs. Jules knew she could not do this herself. She had to find a likely man who would have the technique to which she could add the drive and the application. Poor Jules was the man she chose. Little did he suspect the heroic role for which his wife had cast him. The man who is coupled with a partner like this says good-bye to rest and contentment this side of the grave. Her parents had named her Diana, never suspecting how apt it was to prove. Her father was also an employee in the Renault works, a foreman in one of the shops, brought up in this atmosphere of concentrated industrialism. Poor Jules's Diana had absorbed this passion for individualism and getting on. She was the tireless and insatiable huntress, not of the wild woods but of the close-packed machine shops, and her aim in life was to turn Jules into a second Monsieur Renault, holding important conferences, sought after by grafting politicians, feared as one fears God by his thousands of workers—a fear which increased as they rose in his service because they had more to lose should it be his whim to sack them. And, for her share, Diana would have a house here and a flat there, and a yacht, and an extensive range of dresses, none of which would have made her anything like as attractive as the last-joined little chorus girl of a third-rate music-hall show, and a succession of gentlemen to seek her out and to court and flatter her, knowing that it was she who was the power behind the throne of Jules Deschamps.

Marie Thérèse reached Billancourt a month before her marriage, intending to spend the time in last efforts for her examinations, and then in getting together her trousseau. She reckoned without Mr. Drake. Her mother, reached Billancourt three days before the

ceremony. She had never left the farm for a night since Charles Deschamps had brought her there. She looked forward to the few days when she would not have to think of her animals or the farm operations. She too had reckoned without Mr. Drake. L'Anglais arrived two days before the wedding, fully intending during the time that was left to school himself thoroughly in the intricacies of the French marriage ceremony. He too had reckoned without Mr. Drake.

Mr. Drake was from the 'Sta-a-tes'. '*Osmund G. Drake*' announced his cards, which he passed round to everyone—with the ominous information—Patent Agent. He was as fluent in French as in English, and he spoke both with a violent American accent interlarded with a vast amount of charm. He was thin and tall and courteous; one might have taken him for an English aristocrat till his slow raucous voice destroyed the illusion which his careful choice of words and moderation and lavish smiles and patience ever sought to repair.

Marie Thérèse found him coming into the house and disturbing its peace from the moment she arrived. Immersed in her examinations and l'Anglais and the preparations for the wedding, she never suspected what he and Diana and poor Jules, too, were up to. Gilberte found him smiling down upon her before she had time to take off her hat and coat—'like a great devil', as she said then, and had little reason to change her opinion later.

'But what's this?' demanded Gilberte.

In front of her, perched on a sideboard, was a black metal contraption which looked like a mechanized hobgoblin.

'That, madame,' said Osmund G. Drake, 'is one of the most revolutionary inventions in the world. A carburettor which will drive a car, or a lorry, an aeroplane, or a liner, twice as far for half the petrol it now needs. We have here, madame, an invention which will vie with the discovery of the steam engine and the Bessemer process. The inventor of this carburettor is no other than your own son, madame, and I am proud to be associated with him as agent for the purpose of putting this article on the market.'

And then to a horrified Gilberte, who knew how easily her poor Jules could be imposed upon, Mr. Drake began to unfold his plans for the launching of the carburettor into the motor industry. Every item of the Deschamps property—which meant the farm and everything in it—was to be mortgaged up to the last franc. The launching of the carburettor was to follow, and then as surely as day succeeded night back would come, as the reward of their faith and enterprise,

a vast return of francs which would redeem the mortgages and allow Gilberte to live like a lady for the rest of her days.

In the whirlpool of Mr. Drake's eloquence and smiles Gilberte stood bewildered, staring at the model of the carburettor. More than ever it looked like a mocking demon.

The farm to be mortgaged . . . !

When next day the Englishman arrived, Mr. Drake turned the battery of his charms upon him.

'Now I know what your plans are, I think. I've lived long enough with the folks of old England to know what your dreams are. You've bought a li'l house down round Croydon, shall we say. . . .'

'Wimbledon, if you want to know,' said Treleaven, his ire beginning to rise at the American's familiarity.

'Wimbledon, good!' pursued the imperturbable patent agent. 'It'll be nice for the tennis. You've bought your li'l house for your li'l wifie'—a bow to Marie Thérèse.

'Wifie?' echoed Marie Thérèse.

'And you're looking forward to living there the rest of your lives. Let me give you a word of advice, Mister Treleaven. Don't do it. Rise above it. Fortune beckons'—a vigorous thumb jerked towards the carburettor—'sell that li'l house. If you've bought furniture, sell that. Sell the Jacobean sideboard. Sell the inlaid mahogany bedroom suite. Don't hire that water-heating apparatus. Come in on the ground floor while you've got the chance, and come in strong. Come in with everything you've got. You've got to put every halfpenny you've got into this little affair. You've got . . .'

'Got,' exclaimed l'Anglais sharply. 'Who says I've got? Do you mean to say I'm bound to put my money in a business like this?'

'Yes,' retorted Mr. Drake, carried away by the exuberance of his own verbosity. 'You've got to liquidate every cent, every dime, you've got to put it into this venture. . . .'

'Indeed,' snapped l'Anglais angrily. 'Then let me tell you I've not got to do any such thing.'

'You haven't got to do any such thing?' repeated Mr. Drake slowly, suddenly realizing with a bump that instead of an audience only too anxious to drink in his assurances he was faced with a strong hostility. He looked at l'Anglais intently for the first time. He was face to face with the most obstinate human being in the world—the snub-nosed Saxon—though Treleaven's nose was not noticeably

snub but was passably shapely and small for a man. But there was no mistaking the type now that the whole face was pursed and contracted in a determined resistance to the American.

'No,' answered l'Anglais. 'I haven't got to do any such thing.'

'You mean, if I take you rightly,' replied Mr. Drake quietly, 'you aren't bound to?'

'I do,' was the stubborn reply.

'Sure you're not bound to,' cooed the American, 'but you won't mind me saying you're making the biggest mistake.'

'Tell me this,' pursued l'Anglais, 'when all the money is put together who's going to look after it?'

'Why, anyone you like,' replied Mr. Drake agreeably.

'Have you got any together yet?' demanded Treleaven.

'A few thousand francs. That wouldn't go far.'

'I bet not, and where is it?'

'Safely locked up in the bank.'

'In whose name?'

'Well it just went into my account. I had an account and it seemed silly to open another for the time.'

'And when you get the mortgage money on the farm is it going into the same account?'

'That'll be just as you and the others like to arrange. I don't mind one bit.'

'How much money are you putting in?'

'Every cent, every dime I've got,' replied Mr. Drake dramatically, 'when I can get it across the Atlantic.'

'Well, can't you?'

'No, I can't.' Complications too long to explain for the moment. . . .

The exchange had taken place in English and the others were pressing for an interpretation. Mr. Drake obliged, during which time Treleaven took the opportunity of whispering into Marie Thérèse's ear, 'This damn fellow's a charlatan.'

'*Regardez ici,*' suddenly began l'Anglais, and stopped to demand of Marie Thérèse the word for 'now'.

'What do you want to say?' asked Marie Thérèse.

'I want to say "now look here",' said Treleaven, hurrying through the pages of a pocket dictionary.

'Now—*maintenant*, but we don't say that,' said Marie Thérèse.

'Anyway I'm going to,' replied her headstrong intended. He set himself to work with an energy that commanded the attention of all present.



'Maintenant regardez ici,' he exclaimed. '*J'ai connu un homme qui a inventé un pipe—*'

'Un pipe?' demanded Jules, whose ear for French spoken by a foreigner was as quickly taken as was his unhappy grandfather's fifty years back.

'Do you mean a pipe to smoke?' asked Marie Thérèse.

'No, a sort of metallic tubing for gas stoves and that kind of thing.'

'Un tuyau,' interpreted Mr. Drake.

'Anyhow, *il l'a inventé ce chose et après il l'a patenté. Compris?*'

'Bien,' replied Jules. '*Il a patenté ce chose et puis. . .*'

'Pwee?' asked Treleven.

'What next?' explained Marie Thérèse.

Stumbling along, refusing to be assisted, l'Anglais told the story of the *tuyau*. *Cet homme* had sunk all his money in buying machinery to make the piping, then couldn't get anyone to buy it, and at last got so deeply in debt that he was thankful to sell the invention for a song.

He concluded, '*Aujourd'hui vous avez avoir beaucoup de l'argent pour commencer un chose. Le petit homme ne peut pas commencer. . .*'

'Exactement,' replied Mr. Drake triumphantly. 'Isn't that exactly what I say? Isn't that what I'm urging upon you? Don't I tell you to put into this invention of the carburettor every halfpenny you can get hold of?'

'But Mr. Drake,' demanded Marie Thérèse, 'if the invention fails and we lose our money, what about my mother and the farm?'

'It isn't going to fail,' Mr. Drake answered her.

'Well, I won't agree to touching the farm,' retorted Marie Thérèse. 'I'd never agree to that.'

'Mortgage the farm?' demanded Gilberte. 'But what are you thinking about?'

'You leave the farm out of it, my friend,' counselled Treleven. 'You and Jules can take risks if you like. You've no right to bring his mother into the gamble.'

'You see,' explained Mr. Drake patiently, 'you talk as if to mortgage the farm and what-not meant the same thing as to lose them there and then. But it isn't. You're only using them to further your own ends. Once this little affair's properly started there you are. The mortgage goes—paid off. You don't jest unnerstand.'

'No,' echoed Mrs. Jules tensely, 'they don't understand.'

'*Je compris* all right,' said l'Anglais—he did after Marie Thérèse

had faithfully interpreted the last exchange. 'But what you've got to understand is that you're not going to touch that farm.'

'Just as you like,' answered Mr. Drake, 'but of course you will remember, won't you, that a quarter of that farm belongs to Jules, and if he sells out his quarter the three-quarters left might leave the family estate in a pretty queer shape.'

'I see,' said l'Anglais.

'But,' exclaimed Marie Thérèse, 'you don't mean to suggest that Jules would sell his share of the farm?'

Mr. Drake had, as he well knew, pointed to the chink in the Deschamps armour. Charles Deschamps had done his best for Gilberte as far as he could by will, but the paternal French law would not let him do more than he had. He had left half the farm to Gilberte and a quarter each to Marie Thérèse and Jules. Had he been able he would have left everything to Gilberte, arguing that with him she had worked hard to give the two children a good start upon a career and that was as much as they had any right to expect.

Had Charles been a mere Englishman he could have left the property as he liked. He could have cut Gilberte, Jules and Marie Thérèse off with a shilling. One English husband in ten thousand leaves his family with even less, but the other nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine make very satisfactory wills and modestly situated widows like Gilberte usually get all. In France the one husband cannot play tricks on his family. The wife must have a given share, the children theirs. Only what little remains can the husband dispose of as he likes. And so, alas! the nine thousand odd other Frenchmen who are quite as anxious for their widows' welfare as the average Englishman cannot protect their wives from the carburettors and Mr. Drakes and the insatiable ambitions of Dianas who would, without compunction, melt down their means of livelihood into one small ingot of gold and fling it recklessly upon the dicing tables of modern industrialism.

'But Jules,' protested Marie Thérèse, 'you'd never let him do that?'

Up to now Jules, immense and towering, had taken no share in the discussion, standing out above the mêlée and looking down blandly and absently at the combatants, occasionally fidgeting with the carburettor which was causing all the to-do and galvanizing sharply into life whenever the Englishman went lumbering into action with his customary preface '*maintenant regardez ici*'.

'Do what?' asked Jules.

'Sell your quarter of the farm.'

'Not sell it.'

'Or mortgage it. Surely not. Think what it would mean if it had to be sold.'

Mr. Drake came to his assistance.

'Think, my dear mademoiselle, what it would mean if it didn't have to be sold. Do you want your mother to be continually wearing herself out working herself to death on that farm?'

Gilberte interrupted sharply.

'Listen, monsieur. I have spent nearly all my life on that farm and I shan't leave it. The work doesn't worry me. I should go on working whatever happened—unless I got sold up, and I don't want that.'

By this time Gilberte thoroughly realized what was at stake, and the more Mr. Drake smiled and explained and reassured her the more alarmed she became.

Round and round went the argument. Suddenly the Englishman broke into it with his '*maintenant regardez ici*'. He had just remembered that he was to be married in French to-morrow and had had no schooling to help him through the ordeal.

'*Demain je marie*,' he announced. '*Quoi il faut dire à la maire?*'

'*A la maire? Oui, bien sûr à la maire*,' said Jules, rolling this particularly tasty sweetmeat round in his mouth.

'*Le maire*, John,' corrected Marie Thérèse. 'Why do you say "*la*"? He's a man.'

She was just beginning to realize the full horror of marrying an Englishman.

'Well,' pursued l'Anglais indefatigably, '*que faut-il dire à le maire?*'

'*A le maire*, my tear Tchon,' said Jules, '*c'est très simple. Il faut dire "Oui, Monsieur le maire" chaque fois que le maire vous regarde et attend.*'

'Yes,' added Mr. Drake, helpful as always, bearing no ill-will against the Englishman for having led the resistance against his schemes, 'it's quite simple. You say "*Oui, Monsieur le maire*" every time he looks at you and waits for you to say something.'

Then back to the carburettor.

The appointment with Monsieur le maire was at eleven next morning. Treleaven found his bride awaiting him in the living-room of Jules's flat in blue with white at the throat and cuffs. '*Mais*,' was all he could exclaim, for Marie Thérèse looked perfect. Treleaven himself had turned out in a grey lounge suit. Jules had an eye for good cloth and good tailoring. He thought, 'We couldn't buy cloth like that in France,' but was careful not to say so.

The room in which the marriage ceremonies were performed at the Town Hall was on the first floor. A broad uncarpeted staircase led up to it, with landings at every sixth stair. On these landings wedding parties for two generations since the Town Hall was built had awaited their turn. At one time no doubt the building had looked spick and span but now it was badly in need of renovation. Most of the paint on the woodwork had peeled off. The walls were grey and patched with damp, and here and there a lump of plaster had dropped out. The window panes were thick with dust, and they looked as if they had never been opened since they were put in.

On the landing immediately outside the room in which the marriages were solemnized a party was already waiting, and soon after Marie Thérèse and Treleven arrived a third party took up their station on the landing below them. The brides of both these groups had taken care to emphasize their present virginal status with vast quantities of white millinery and large bouquets of white flowers. Obviously the third party were well-to-do. The bridegroom sported a frock-coat and a top-hat. The bride's bouquet was of lilies—an immense affair. She looked Marie Thérèse up and down with a disdainful air, and her demeanour generally appeared to be one of protest against a community which set such excessive store on Liberty, Fraternity and Equality as to require her to wait on this dusty stairway for two other parties whose only claim to precedence was that they had got there first.

The party above were smallholders from the outskirts of the town.

Balzac and Daudet would have enjoyed their noisy conversation, and Zola would undoubtedly have filled a page of his notebook. The bride, plump and highly coloured as a Normandy apple, stood in her maiden vestments silent and smiling appreciatively whilst the bridegroom, some inches shorter, sketched in broad outline the joys that were soon to be his. Indeed, there was considerable evidence on which to base the belief that the joys of the nuptial hours had been to some extent at least anticipated.

Marie Thérèse blushed at the remarks she could not help overhearing. She felt her position most acutely. For the first time she was thankful that Treleven's French was so hopeless. Jules, smiling broadly, took in every word. Indeed, he almost made himself one of the smallholders' party and possibly would have had not Mr. Drake, who had come as a witness, kept pestering him with two letters he had received—one from a firm which was contracting to

supply the machinery to make the carburettor and the other from someone who would 'fix' the factory accommodation.

At last the Seine valley horticulturalists passed through the doors at which they had been waiting, and Marie Thérèse and her party moved up to take their place.

In ten minutes the doors opened again. The smallholders came out, man and wife, the bride still silent and smiling, her husband holding on to her firmly as he might have walked off with a much coveted beast from a cattle market, and then Marie Thérèse and Treleven were ushered in.

They were put to sit in two heavy chairs in front of some lines of other chairs. One or two clerks sat at tables on each side of a raised dais in front of the chairs. The party sat down and waited expectantly. The room was in keeping with the rest of the building. The same dusty windows, the same need for paint and plaster on the woodwork and walls. The chairs and tables with pockets of dust in every chink and cranny. Even the clerks looked grubby and unkempt, and their clothes frayed and botched.

Then suddenly, like a burst of sunshine breaking unexpectedly upon a grey day, entered Monsieur le maire. Everyone stood up respectfully. He was a short, chubby man with a bright complexion, alert blue eyes and a close-clipped grey beard. He came in with a quick, lively step as if he were entering to the strains of a wedding march. In marked contrast to the clerks he was faultlessly attired in morning dress, and his black coat betrayed no speck of dust. Over his right shoulder he wore the broad ribbon of his office, the bright red, white and blue of the tricolour of the Republic.

'Good Lord,' thought Treleven, who had an eye for likenesses, 'it's Poincaré.'

The clerks subsided into the seats and the others followed suit. Only Monsieur le maire remained standing.

He looked at a form and frowned. Then he turned to Treleven. With a puzzled air he asked, 'Monsieur Treleven, are you of French nationality?'

'*Oui, Monsieur le maire,*' answered Treleven, rising respectfully from his chair.

'*Non, non,*' exclaimed Marie Thérèse. 'He's an Englishman.'

'I understand,' answered Monsieur le maire. 'Please sit down.'

Turning again to Treleven, he asked, 'Do you understand French, or do you need an interpreter?'

'*Oui, Monsieur le maire,*' replied the carefully coached Anglais.

Marie Thérèse looked at him fiercely. So did all the others.

He would be letting himself in for an interpreter's fee if he went on like this, and no good Frenchman, still less a good Frenchwoman, wants to pay unnecessary fees to bureaucrats.

'You understand—you don't want it,' whispered Marie Thérèse, first in English and then in French.

'*Oui, Monsieur le maire,*' persisted Treleaven, looking the trim little man squarely in the face. To convince His Worship he added a phrase or two of his own he had thought out for himself.

'*Assez pour le mariage, monsieur. Nous avons le même chose en Angleterre.*'

This remarkable display seemed to satisfy the mayor. He went on with the ceremony.

'*Oui, Monsieur le maire,*' said l'Anglais every time he paused and looked at him.

'*Oui, Monsieur le maire,*' said Marie Thérèse firmly in her turn.

The ceremony was soon over. Monsieur le maire's official work done, he suddenly unbent and beamed cordially as he shook Treleaven and Marie Thérèse warmly by the hand and wished them luck.

'I am gone to London,' he told Treleaven. 'Victoria, Buckingham Palace. Prance of Wells, de Derby—eh?' and once more he shook Treleaven's hand.

'You will be ver' 'appy,' he said. 'She is nice girl—ver' pritty, *n'est-ce pas?*'

On the landing outside Mr. and Mrs. Treleaven nearly collided with the bride with the lilies, who was giving them one last preen prior to the interview with the mayor. Two more parties had gathered on the landings below; Monsieur le maire was having a busy day.

The wedding breakfast was eaten in a small, plainly furnished hotel a hundred yards away. Guide Michelin, that incorrigible old gourmet, would have begrudged the 'Hotel of the Town Hall' a single star, but it knew its business. For years it had given couples their send-off feed, and Treleaven, brought up in English restaurants, thought he was lunching on ambrosia. The proprietor, discovering he was English, insisted on his coming out to the back to see the pond in which he kept his trout—'*son vivier*'—and dipped out a few magnificent specimens for the fish course, to follow the soup which followed the hors d'œuvres, to which the inexperienced Englishman helped himself far too freely.

And for liquid refreshment there was Cidre Bok and Frontignan wine.

Treleaven had tasted nothing like it. Mr. Drake held the bottle up to the sun. 'Bottled sunshine,' he said.

*'Ils n'en ont pas en Angleterre,'* grinned Jules.

'Non,' agreed Treleaven, who was discovering that when a sentence included 'ne' and 'pas' it was usually safe to say 'non'.

After the meal Gilberte insisted upon going back to the farm that night. Useless to point out that she would get no train for La Chataignerie till morning and would spend best part of the night in a hotel or in the station waiting-room. She was profoundly uneasy. She thought that already there might be a mortgage on the farm, and she was in a fever to get back to make sure it was there as she had left it.

These first three days that she had spent away from the farm since Charles Deschamps had brought her there as his bride had been no rest. She had come up full of anxiety about Marie Thérèse's Englishman. She had found him a friendly, kindly-looking fellow, honest and healthy, and presentable in appearance. His complete inability to understand what she said, due partly to a liberal mixture of the Creuse patois with her French, irritated her beyond measure. 'All he can say,' she complained, 'is, "*Je ne comprends pas,*" and you would think he is making fun of me.'

But the Englishman had turned out to be a small matter. It was Jules and his carburettor which had spoilt this three-day break. It was a new and unexpected menace. The Boche might come and take her farm and set up a Prussian colonist in her place. But this was the enemy within the gates—her own children might use the farm as a stake to win a fortune for themselves, careless that if they lost she would have no roof and no means of earning her livelihood.

All the three nights which Gilberte had spent at Billancourt, Jules's carburettor slipped out of its box on the sideboard in the dining-room and perched itself on the foot rail of the bed, sometimes sitting down on it and jeering at her, more often dancing up and down it like a tight-rope walker.

'I'll have you out,' it cried in the silence of the night. 'Anyway, Jules is entitled to his quarter, and when you take a quarter of the barn and a quarter of the house and a quarter of each field, what good will your farm be?'

In going back by the afternoon train Gilberte was taking flight from her tormentor. She could not rest another night in the house with it. And from Mr. Drake and Mrs. Jules too. The American's everlasting presence and his raucous sing-song nasalities made her want to scream, but it was against Diana, the pitiless, implac-

able huntress, that Gilberte's fury was greatest. She knew quite well how weak and pliable Jules was in the hands of this strong and vaunting spirit, now taunting him with timidity, now flattering him and filling his mind with alluring pictures of fortune to come. To achieve her ambitions this man-faced woman with the hungry, searching eyes would sacrifice everything and everyone who came within her reach. Only once in her life did Gilberte allude to her by her name. '*Ma bru*,' she called her—my daughter-in-law—'*Ma bru*.' To hear Gilberte speak the words was to know how much detestation can be put into two simple sounds.

'You'll do nothing which will involve the farm,' Marie Thérèse pleaded as she in her turn took leave of Jules. His wife and Mr. Drake, with their cold, calculating faces, stood on either side of him.

'You'll do nothing that will upset Mother, will you, Jules?'

'Oh . . . *mais*,' protested Jules. It was not convincing.

In the first-class compartment of the train which took them to Paris they were at last alone.

Marie Thérèse, a little scared, as her wide-open eyes betrayed, allowed her husband to take her into his arms.

'Damn it, Terry,' he grumbled, 'with that blasted carburettor—you'd never think we were starting our honeymoon.'

## 26

### 'MAURICE AND GABRIELLE

'**M**ONSIEUR,' said the pink-faced, white-haired, frock-coated gentleman who had followed Marie Thérèse and Treleven round the Panthéon where they had solemnly inspected the tombs of Jean Jacques, Victor Hugo and Voltaire, 'will you forgive me? I cannot resist the opportunity of speaking to English visitors or of listening to them when they talk. I see you are interested in architecture.'

'*Oui, monsieur*,' said Treleven.

'I guessed as much,' said the little gentleman, bowing and smiling with the greatest pleasure. 'That was why I ventured to—to butt in, as you say. [Another bow.] I wanted to ask if you had seen the church of Sainte Geneviève, St. Etienne-du-Mont. So many of our visitors miss it. It is only a few minutes' walk from here and the



contrast between the two styles—the Renaissance of the Panthéon and the church—is so interesting.’

‘Touting to guide us round, I suppose,’ thought Treleaven, and at once began to get anxious as to how much you paid such a fellow. But the little gentleman dispelled their anxieties at once.

‘Had I the time I would gladly take you to the church now. Unfortunately an appointment, as one says in England, an appointment, and with this sacred word all questions are stilled. But I will show you the way——’

Thus it was that Marie Thérèse and Treleaven discovered this gem which so many other visitors miss. Treleaven lingered before the pulpit and the screen, spell-bound, Marie Thérèse linking her arm in his, and happy that he was finding so much in Paris to wonder at and enjoy. Admiration of France and Paris was to her much the same as admiration of herself.

A guide took them with a small party, mostly of French pilgrims, to see the reliquary of Sainte Geneviève. He told once again the story of how Sainte Geneviève had protected Paris from the Hun two thousand years ago and how her spirit still hovered over her city and had protected it from a similar desecration in 1914-18 and, yes, might still be needed for the same task, though for the moment it might seem to some that the barbarian hordes beyond the Rhine had been flung back to their proper confines for ever.

Treleaven turned back to the church and was lost again in the wonder of the carving of the screen. Suddenly——

‘Gabrielle!’

‘Marie Thérèse!’

He turned to find Marie Thérèse in the arms of a stranger—another woman of about her own age. Behind her stood a gentleman of medium height looking as much like a Frenchman as any Englishman could desire, dark, plump, well-knit, immaculately dressed as for a visit to church.

‘This is Maurice,’ said Gabrielle, introducing the dark gentleman.

‘Monsieur,’ said Marie Thérèse.

‘Monsieur,’ said Treleaven.

‘*Enchanté*,’ said Maurice.

‘*Mon mari*,’ said Marie Thérèse.

‘Ah,’ exclaimed Gabrielle.

‘*Enchanté*,’ said the Englishman.

The two women chatted away excitedly with one half of their consciousness and weighed each other up with the other half.

They had been school-mates. Many a time and oft Marie Thérèse had helped Gabrielle with her English and mathematics. Many a time she had taken her into her own bed in the cold winters of the war and kept her warm with her more substantial person. Gabrielle had looked up to Marie Thérèse as to some superior being. She was so far ahead of her in her studies that she thought she would never overtake her. But the world had other values. Marie Thérèse was in her wedding frock, and pretty and dainty it looked, but Gabrielle saw in it the careful choice of the peasant who wanted something that would last as well as look attractive for a day. Unseen generations of peasant stock had stood behind Marie Thérèse when, thoughtfully fingering the material at the counter, she had made her choice.

As for Gabrielle— What she wore looked as if it had never been worn before—a cloak in grey, with a dress of crimson-coloured silk below, cut with the unfaltering skill of an artist—and then Marie Thérèse saw that since they had parted on leaving school Gabrielle, who had been long and thin and frail, had become beautiful, and was now tall and slender and graceful with pale cheeks and deep, brooding, lustrous eyes which had raised her from her middle-class origins to what was obvious affluence. To Marie Thérèse, as to any other Frenchwoman, that cloak and dress alone meant the Rue Royale or Place de l'Opéra and nothing less.

'But you are beautiful, Gabrielle,' exclaimed Marie Thérèse.

'You also, *ma chérie*,' answered Gabrielle.

'No,' said Marie Thérèse simply. 'Not as you are.'

They moved down the aisle whispering excitedly. Gabrielle was ravished to think that Marie Thérèse had married an Anglais. He was an engineer—Maurice was a painter. They would have so much to talk about together. And this was their honeymoon. 'But a honeymoon in Paris! No, but it was impossible. No one ever spent their honeymoon in Paris.' Maurice linked his arm in the Englishman's in the most natural way and pointed out in brief whispers points in the stonework which had escaped him. As they reached the porch Treleven turned for a last look at the church, and meanwhile Maurice helped himself generously from the font of holy water.

Outside he drew Treleven aside and pointed to a hotel at the corner of the square. The Englishman looked at him uncomprehendingly. The sun glistened on the dab of holy water fast fading from his forehead.

'I lived in that hotel with a young woman years ago,' he said.

'*Je ne comprends pas,*' answered Treleaven, with disconcerting fluency.

Marie Thérèse and Gabrielle were a few yards ahead.

'I say, Terry,' he called.

'*Non, non,*' cried Maurice.

'What is it?' demanded Marie Thérèse.

'*C'est rien,*' protested Maurice. 'I was just telling him that Lenin lived in that hotel for eighteen months.'

'Lenin,' frowned Gabrielle. 'He was that awful Russian. Why do you bother about such a creature, Maurice? He's always fussing about politics——'

She carried Marie Thérèse on and they both plunged delightedly into their world of chiffons and life-stories and meetings and partings.

Gabrielle led Marie Thérèse to a sparkling limousine some twenty yards away. They got into the back. Maurice took the wheel with Treleaven beside him.

'What do you think, Maurice? They've been eating in the Boulevard St. Michel.'

Maurice stopped the car with a jerk.

'The Boulevard St. Michel,' he exclaimed. 'But, my poor monsieur, you must be poisoned. To eat in such places! But it's like committing suicide.'

'*J'ai très bien mangé,*' said the Englishman stoutly. He had never enjoyed eating so much in his life—*crème fraîche*, chestnut jam, the sparkling variety of the hors d'œuvres. Paradise could not have produced better fare.

'You must come with us for lunch,' said Gabrielle. 'This afternoon we will go out to Fontainebleau, if you like, and to-night we'll have dinner and a theatre.'

'Have we got tangled up in some damned American film, Terry?' muttered Treleaven.

The limousine had swept down to the Seine and crossed it by the Pont St. Michel, then up the Champs Elysées, to stop outside a tall block of flats. A lift had taken them to a top story where Maurice and Gabrielle had their flat and now they were on the balcony looking down over the great road below with the Louvre and the Place de la Concorde at one end and l'Etoile at the other.

'We had just moved in when the Peace Treaty procession passed along here,' said Gabrielle. 'There were a lot of Englishmen—de Tommees and sailors. They looked so—so chic, *n'est-ce pas?*'

'John was in the Navy,' said Marie Thérèse.

'In the Navy,' exclaimed Maurice. 'De Royalc Navee? Oh, but

the Royale Breteesh Navee—that is the one thing perfect in this imperfect world. “Gudd save de Keeng”. Were you an officer, my tear Tchon?”

‘Loo-tenant,’ said Treleven. ‘*Warspite*.’

‘De *Warspite*,’ exclaimed Maurice. His excitement was bringing back a smattering of English learnt under protest at school years ago. ‘*Alors—Jutland?*’

‘*Oui*,’ nodded Treleven, astonished that a painter in the middle of France should have such an intimate knowledge of the battle.

‘*Cinquième Squadron—Feeft Squadron—Amiral Beatty*,’ continued Maurice, and Treleven’s astonishment grew. ‘Your ship was hit by a German shell and she went round and round in circles. Interpret that for me, my dear madame.’

Marie Thérèse interpreted.

‘Where’s he got all this from?’ asked Treleven.

‘What are you thinking about?’ Maurice suddenly thundered at Gabrielle. ‘An officer of the Royal Navy comes to the flat and you don’t ask him to have a drink. Bring the grog.’

‘The grog?’ echoed Gabrielle.

‘Yes, de grog. That is the only thing an old sea dog will drink. *N’est-ce pas*, Tchon? De grog. Splice de mainbrace, eh?’

Gabrielle brought out some bottles of champagne, the nearest she could get to grog. Everybody talked. That is, everyone except Treleven, who was turning the leaves of his pocket English-French dictionary.

Suddenly he broke in with, ‘*Je trouve le drôle—*’

There was a sudden silence.

‘What?’ exclaimed Marie Thérèse, horrified at this latest monstrosity.

‘*Je trouve le drôle—*’ persisted Treleven.

‘What do you mean?’

‘*Oui, oui*, Tchon,’ said Maurice. ‘*Moi aussi*.’

‘*Je trouve le drôle*.’

‘But we don’t say that, John,’ pleaded Marie Thérèse. ‘What do you mean?’

‘I think it funny,’ said Treleven.

‘But “*je trouve le drôle*” means “I find the clown”, It doesn’t mean “I find it funny” at all.’

‘Not at all,’ cried Maurice. ‘*Alors*, Tchon—*Je trouve le drôle*. Don’t interrupt him, Marie Thérèse. *Continuez*, Tchon. *Vous trouvez le drôle*.’

Maurice was the prey of ideas but he lyed for his senses—for

what harvests his eyes and ears and lips and nose and sensitive fingers brought him. The Englishman's French was a new and unsuspected delight.

But Marie Thérèse's interruption had broken the first rapturous inspiration and he went on largely with her help as interpreter.

'Here you are,' said Treleaven, head down, eyes up, as if about to lead an assault. 'You've got the Germans down and out and yet you still think about the Germans attacking you and getting into Paris. You still look to Sainte Geneviève to keep the Huns out.'

'*Bien sûr*,' cried Maurice. '*Bien sûr* we pray to Sainte Geneviève. We shall need her before long more than we've ever needed her in the past.'

'*Mais, non*,' protested Treleaven.

'*Non?*' cried Maurice. 'You don't know the Boche. We do. We've been bitten by the mad dog and we know. Look—who did it take to chase them back across the Rhine?—the Russians, the Americans, you and us. The Russians may fight for themselves if they have to. The Americans have gone home and they're saying they'll never come back again. The English—you, you treacherous rascals, my dear Tchon—are treating the Boche as if he were your ally in the last war and we were your enemy.'

'Well, we don't reckon to kick a dog when he's down,' said Treleaven stubbornly, overwhelmed by the lucidity of the Frenchman but with no thought of abandoning his guns.

'The Boche isn't a dog,' retorted Maurice. 'He's a tiger, a jackal, a hyena, any savage beast you like. You don't kick them, but you do keep them behind bars. You think we Frenchmen are crazy. You will see. You don't know the Boche as we do. Fifty years ago he marched down past here. He'll be passing again before you and I are sixty. You may laugh. He may get to London next time. Ah, you think that's absurd. Yes, you still have the Channel and maybe it'll save you this time as it saved you from the Spaniards and Napoleon. But you know the British Empire isn't going to last for ever. You were nearly too late last time. You may be too late next time.'

'Well,' was all the Englishman could reply to this torrent. Inwardly he thought—'All these Frenchmen are the same. They would not be happy unless all the Germans were wiped off the face of the earth.'

'*Alors*, my dear Tchon.' Maurice tapped Treleaven on the shoulder. 'We won't quarrel, you and I. Come to my study. Let me show you the books I have about Jutland.'

Along the corridor Maurice led him to a long room lined with bookcases and with a large globe in a corner. They stopped before one bookcase and Treleven found to his astonishment a whole shelf of books about naval actions during the Great War, most of them about Jutland, some translations from German accounts of the engagement. Maurice opened one at a photograph of the *Queen Elizabeth*. 'That woz yours—"Vorspite"—"Queen Leezzie"—de same classe, *n'est-ce pas?*'

Most of the books were about travel, many were geographical treatises on distant countries.

'*Vous aimez—what's travel?*' Treleven shuffled the pages of his dictionary. '*Vous aimez voyager?*' he asked.

'*Ah, mais non,*' replied Maurice. 'To read, yes, but I 'aff nevair lef' France.'

'*Non?*'

'Once.' The dark features of the Frenchman became overcast at the recollection of the risk he had run of leaving his country. 'During the war, I nearly went to Italy. Fortunately at the last minute the orders were cancelled.'

'*Mais,*' said Treleven, '*vous aimez—to read—lire d'autres contrées, et vous n'aimez pas visiter?*'

'*Non, non, non,*' replied Maurice emphatically. 'I know already there is no country in the world with everything one can wish for like France. My tear Tchou, we have everything. Everything is perfect. That is why the Boche wants to steal our country from us.'

Meanwhile Gabrielle had taken Marie Thérèse into her boudoir whilst she changed the crimson-coloured dress for a gown less formal and more in keeping with the expedition to Fontainebleau.

Two beds placed chastely side by side filled one end of the room, each in brown, highly grained wood and covered with blue silk spreads. A wealth of built-in cupboards and low bookshelves in the same coloured wood ran round the walls. The only other furniture was a dressing-table before the window. A few groups of books, richly bound, were placed on the shelves and there was a sparse display of statuettes and vases.

Gabrielle slipped off her dress and Marie Thérèse gave a little gasp. Her old school-friend's limousine, her beautifully embroidered cloak and gown, her expensive, tastefully furnished flat in the heart of fashionable Paris, had not excited in her one jot of envy, but the sight of the wonderful underwear which the crimson dress had hidden made her gasp with envy. They fixed Gabrielle's long limbs and slender body as the petals of a rose fold round its heart.

Marie Thérèse could not restrain herself from taking the delicate fabric in her fingers and looking from a few inches away at the discreetly worked embroidery and marvelling at its dainty stitches.

'Yes, they are nice, aren't they?' said Gabrielle carelessly. 'Maurice wouldn't look at me in anything else.'

'How long have you been married, Gabrielle?' asked Marie Thérèse.

'Married? My dear, we're not married.'

Marie Thérèse was silent.

'*Etes-vous "shocké"?*' demanded Gabrielle.

'But Gabrielle,' said Marie Thérèse, 'suppose you have children?'

'Maurice would be the proudest man in the world. It's his greatest ambition.'

'Then I suppose you'd get married?'

'I suppose we should. Maurice is always worrying me about getting married.'

'Why don't you?'

'Oh, I like him,' said Gabrielle. 'But—I suppose you want children, Thérèse?'

'I suppose so.'

'Well, so do I. Besides,' with expert fingers Gabrielle was putting the finishing touches to the tea-gown, 'he's so ridiculous. He's always fussing about politics. He says the Germans will be in Paris in twenty years' time. Well, suppose they are? I can't stop them, and I can't be bothered about what will happen in 1940.'

Meanwhile, back in the library, Maurice was opening a cupboard behind the great globe. In it hung the uniform of a French officer with the ribbon of the Legion of Honour on the breast. 'Me—*officier*—reserve,' he explained. 'I won't see the Boche walk in and do nothing.'

Astonishing, this German obsession, thought the Englishman.

TRELEAVEN ONE HAD BEEN carefully schooled pending the first visit of his French grand-daughter. On no account was he to talk about her father and grandfather. The tuition was necessary because at seventy-one the old gentleman was badly bitten

by that last infirmity of ageing mind—the ambition to become the oldest inhabitant of the town. It gave him the greatest satisfaction to think that he had survived so long when so many lesser men had fallen by the wayside.

Particularly was it necessary to protect Marie Thérèse, so at least thought Mrs. Treleven One and her son Wesley and his wife, because an examination of births, marriages, and deaths in the two families (until twelve months since quite unknown to each other and always some four or five hundred miles apart) revealed an extraordinary series of coincidences. For Peter Treleven had been born in 1850—six years later than Pierre Deschamps—and but for that fateful encounter with *Kultur* when hardly out of his teens Pierre might still have been pottering about the Creuse as happily busied with 'the common round' on his farm as old Treleven One was at 'Sunrising' looking across Plymouth Sound.

Like Pierre Deschamps, Treleven One had married early—both were wedded in 1870, and both produced a son within the twelve months. Wesley Treleven, like Charles Deschamps, was born in 1870, and again his son John, who was to marry Marie Thérèse, was born in 1896, the same year as Jules and a year before his wife. Wesley, now fifty-one, was still living his life as the leading draper in Kington with zest and verve whilst all that was mortal of poor Charles Deschamps had been scattered to the winds these five years gone.

'So whatever you do, Peter,' admonished Mrs. Treleven One, for the sixth time, 'don't get talking about your age and don't get asking her about her parents.'

For it made no difference to Treleven One's satisfaction that a rival in the race had fallen through accident or violence. To discover this left his sense of superiority in no way diminished.

The French bride could have had nothing to complain of in her reception at Plymouth. John's father, Wesley, and his mother, Miriam, met them at North Road and took them down to the Cattle-water by taxi. Here the *Snowflake* awaited them, moored within yards of the quay from which the Pilgrim Fathers sailed for America.

None of the pilgrims could have been more apprehensive of the perilous voyage which lay before them than was Marie Thérèse at the prospect of crossing the Sound in this, to her, wholly unsubstantial and unsatisfactory craft. *Snowflake* was an appropriate name for so tiny a boat and for so hazardous an adventure. Until now the smallest ship on which she had entrusted herself upon the sea had been a cross-channel packet, and never would she have voluntarily



gone into one of those tiny cockle-shells which men pulled along with oars, or, as in the case of the *Snowflake*, propelled with a small engine.

However, her newly encountered in-laws packed into it without a thought and John jumped aboard as if it were his home. With much foreboding she allowed herself to be handed in, crouching into a seat at the stern without daring to say a word and watching the others moving about the tiny craft, making it sway in a most terrifying fashion.

The *Snowflake*, with John at the wheel, set about subduing the Sound in workmanlike style. Just when Marie Thérèse was achieving some degree of assurance Mrs. Treleven Two pointed out 'Drake's Island'.

'It's just on twelve,' said Treleven Two. 'They fire a gun at midday.'

'A gun,' exclaimed Marie Thérèse, with newly aroused alarm. 'They wouldn't fire a gun as a ship was passing?'

'Oh, they never hit anybody,' her husband assured her, 'at least, not often.'

It was with deep thankfulness, the perilous crossing over, that Marie Thérèse stepped ashore at Kington.

A little later, in the garden of Mr. and Mrs. Treleven One where they went to tea and in whose house 'Sunrising' they were to spend their holiday, Marie Thérèse looked back across the Sound and was amazed to think that she had dared to cross such a wide expanse of water in so tiny a craft. The great harbour spread all around beneath them, losing itself in the sea on the one side and in broad river mouths on the other. Towns, villages, and dockyards fringed its edges, and behind towered in dim blue outline the rounded heights of Dartmoor.

Here if anywhere was liquid history. From the Cattewater opposite one May morning three hundred years ago the *Mayflower* had set sail. How many of like mind and like faith had followed her since then out from these same shores! Almost under the nose of the Kington houses the *Bellerophon* had come to anchor on a dark day in 1815 with no less a personage on board than the dreaded Bonaparte himself. Opposite, immediately across the Sound, was the famous Hoe edged with gleaming terraces of tall houses like big teeth in a laughing mouth.

'That's where Drake was playing bowls when the Armada came in sight,' said Treleven One, as he and Marie Thérèse climbed up the garden behind 'Sunrising', to a seat at the top under apple trees.

'Drake?' asked Marie Thérèse.

'Haven't you heard of Drake?' demanded Treleven One, astonished. 'You've heard of the Spanish Armada?'

'No,' said Marie Thérèse. 'We had so many wars of our own. . . .'

This explanation Treleven One found not a bit satisfactory. He was telling the story of Philip and Elizabeth when the others joined them, Mrs. Treleven One making no secret of her relief that he was not up to worse.

But Treleven One was deeply disturbed in this absence of the historical sense in his grand-daughter-in-law. The Flood, the Crucifixion, Magna Charta, and the Armada—he thought everybody would know of these outstanding moments in world history.

Quite unconscious of the disquietude she had occasioned, Marie Thérèse, with a peasant's eye, was scrutinizing the apple trees.

'You will have a good crop, Grandpa.'

Treleven One beamed. It was the first time Marie Thérèse had addressed him as John had always done. He looked at her intently through his white bushy eyebrows. It was the first time, to his knowledge, he had ever met a Frenchwoman—or, for that matter, anyone French—but this did not deter his passion for generalization.

'Attractive young beggars these Frenchwomen always are,' he thought. To her comment he answered, 'Everything will depend on whether we get rain, my dear.'

He had a fund of anecdotes which he loved to tell. Most of them he had culled from light weekly periodicals—which had formed almost the whole of his reading except what he had done to put his sermons together when he was a local preacher.

'Have you heard of the village down in Cornwall,' he began, 'where they had no rain for a month? The Wesleyans held a prayer meeting and one of the local preachers prayed so long and loudly that at last the rain started. When once it started it went on raining for a month, and it looked as if the harvest would be drowned. So they called another prayer meeting and the same local preacher got up and he said—"It's true we prayed for rain last month but good Lord this is ridiculous" . . .'

At the climax of the story Treleven One burst into laughter as he always did.

Marie Thérèse looked at him with saucer-wide eyes.

'But is it really true?' she asked.

Treleven One stopped laughing for a moment, and then, seeing that Marie Thérèse was perfectly serious, burst out again.

'But do you think God did make the rain come because .

'Because the old fellow wouldn't stop praying—certainly. You should hear some of them. They go on for ever.'

And Treleven One laughed again.

'It's easy enough, Terry,' muttered her husband. 'Just laugh when he laughs.'

But he ought to have known by now that Marie Thérèse was incapable of the most innocent deception. She was honest to a fault. Besides, she could never understand why one just told a story for the sake of a joke even if there was one. Either it was a valuable instance of supernatural intervention or nothing at all and not worth spending time on.

It was not long before the peasant in Marie Thérèse was prompting another question.

'Is that the end of the garden?' she asked, looking at a great outcrop of slate covered with gorse and rock plants which beetled out of the hill above them.

'Yes, that's the end,' said Treleven One. 'A farmer that I knew said he'd give me one of his fields but I had nowhere to put it.'

'Nowhere to put it?' asked Marie Thérèse, bewildered.

Treleven One went off into laughter again but this time he paused suddenly—'She's got no sense of humour,' he thought with a shock.

'Do stop your nonsense, Peter,' said Mrs. Treleven One. 'Here, my dear, come and look what this ridiculous man has got here.'

She drew her arm through Marie Thérèse's and led her through a low hedge of euonymus to a small enclosed garden entirely monopolized by two enormous vegetable marrows as big as two young pigs. Marie Thérèse felt as Alice must have felt when she came upon Tweedledum and Tweedledec in the Land of Marvels.

'There you are,' said Treleven One, patting the rump of one of the marrows affectionately, 'can you grow marrows like that in France?'

Once again Marie Thérèse's passion for the truth got her into difficulties.

'In France,' she said, after a pause, 'we don't grow them. There's no nourishment in them.'

'No nourishment in them,' exclaimed Treleven One.

'Now you've done it,' grinned John.

'Of course there's no nourishment in them. I've always told you so,' said Mrs. Treleven One.

'Then what is there nourishment in?' demanded Treleven One, visibly offended.

'It's all water, Grandpa,' said John, 'and nasty tasting water at that, the way English people usually cook it.'

'I didn't know it would upset him,' whispered Marie Thérèse.

'Englishmen always get upset about their vegetable marrows,' said Mrs. Treleven One. 'Attack the British Empire and say it's going to pieces and they've behaved abominably to everybody all through their history and they'll heartily agree with you. But attack their vegetable marrows and look out. Eh, Peter?' She shook her offended husband as she might a child. 'You'd never think of eating the things, you know that. They're only for Harvest Festival. He puts both in the pulpit and the minister stands between them and every year what with him getting balder and balder he gets to look like a vegetable marrow himself. It looks like a caricature of the Trinity. I wouldn't have it if it was me. . . .'

'Come and see what he's done down here.' They followed a path down the side of the garden where a tiny stream was flowing over ledges of rock on its way to the sea. At a point where it widened into a pool Treleven One had built a dam and in it had placed a watermill.

'If you want to please him,' said Mrs. Treleven One, 'have two children as quickly as you like and send them home here for me to look after. He'll play with them all day long.'

Marie Thérèse stole a glance at Treleven One, now standing a little apart. Tall, slender, stooping, he gazed meditatively across the Sound, smiling benevolently. He appeared to have forgotten his vexation at her criticism of the vegetable marrows.

She thought suddenly with a catch at her heart—'My grandfather would have looked like that!' Put Treleven One in corduroys and a cotton jacket and he would have been ready to personate Pierre Deschamps, dead these fifty years.

A small coastal steamer made its way out between them and the breakwater. Marie Thérèse watched its progress with thoughtful eyes. 'How do they know which part goes first?' she asked, threading her arm through her husband's.

'Ah, now,' replied Treleven Three. 'There you've put your finger on one of the great problems of navigation. Different nations have solved it in different ways. The English have a little notice painted one end saying: "This part goes first", and at the other another notice saying: "This piece goes last". The Germans have a ladder down one end and they send a man down to see if the propellers are down that end and if they are they go the other way first. The Japanese. . . .'

Marie Thérèse was following this explanation with some care when she saw Treleven One doubled up as if with colic and making violent efforts to contain his emotions. He failed and gave way to another burst of laughing.

'Oh, it was not true, John, all this you have been telling me, and I was following it all so carefully,' complained Marie Thérèse.

A silence fell over the great harbour. An ominous throbbing as of some immensely powerful heart made itself felt—felt rather than heard.

'Battleships,' exclaimed Treleven Thrice, sniffing the air.

'Where? I don't see them,' said Marie Thérèse.

'No, I don't see them but they're somewhere.'

Then round a wooded headland nosed a great grey shape.

Treleven eyed it intently for a few seconds. Slowly she emerged until she came completely into view almost at their feet.

'It's the "Lizzie",' cried Treleven, and Marie Thérèse felt his fingers close tightly over hers.

'The Lizzie?'

'The *Queen Elizabeth*,' exclaimed Treleven, more excited than Marie Thérèse had ever seen him. He was looking back to the headland.

'The old *Warspite* may be with her.'

A second battleship came into sight.

'*Malaya*,' said Treleven disappointedly.

A third followed.

'It's the *Warspite*,' cried Treleven delightedly. 'That's the old battleship I was on for three years nearly.'

'How can you tell? They all look the same.'

'Oh, I can tell. How do you think I can tell you from other women?'

He became silent and tense, standing on tiptoe as if by doing so he could see the ship better.

A fourth ship hove into sight, looking even more powerful than the three which preceded it. 'That's a new one,' said Treleven. 'I don't know that fellow.'

But his eyes followed the *Warspite*. 'Lovely old tub she is. I'd give something to have another six months' cruise on her.'

Marie Thérèse looked up at her Englishman. His rapt eyes were still on this grey monstrous shape of steel and stabbing guns.

Treleven had never spoken to Marie Thérèse of any other woman who had come into his life. After a time she had incredulously concluded that there had been none. Not that she would

have minded in the least if there had. No sensible French girl ever did, and her own dominion over him was so complete that she could have no anxiety about the resurrection of a lost love. Had he been a Frenchman he would have felt the need of inventing a few amorous adventures if they had no existence in fact. But now she realized this Englishman of hers had, after all, a past. He had been in love with this ugly creature now filling the air with its sonorous heart-beats and veiling its black stunted form in clouds of smoke. He still was in love with it. She could tell because he never took his eyes off it. He seemed to have no eyes for the other ships though they looked so alike.

This was the sort of thing English youth lost their hearts to, to a battleship, a tank, a wireless set, or a motor-bike. The female pushed her way into these preoccupations as Destiny commanded, and tolerantly, if somewhat begrudgingly, the Englishman made room for her and perched her on the pillion.

Slowly, so slowly that they cut but a tiny pennant out of the sea with their prows, but inevitably, irresistibly, slow and unswerving as the sun now setting behind the Hoe, the great ships passed up shore to the Hamoaze.

'What's the name of that last one?' asked Treleven One when the others had disappeared and the rounded stern of the fourth disclosed the existence of letters forming her name.

'I can't see from here,' said Treleven Three.

'Can you?' asked Treleven One of Marie Thérèse.

Marie Thérèse screwed up her eyes.

'No, I can't read it from here.'

'Hood,' said Treleven One.

'Yes, so it is,' said Marie Thérèse.

'Not bad for seventy, eh, young woman?' asked Treleven One.

'No,' agreed Marie Thérèse.

'How old is your grandfather?' he asked.

'Well—he is dead,' said Marie Thérèse. 'He would have been your age.'

'I see,' said Treleven One sympathetically but not without some satisfaction. 'And how old is your father?'

'He is dead too,' admitted Marie Thérèse, her face clouding over.

Mrs. Treleven One by this time had got round to the far side of her husband. With a fierce dig in the ribs she whispered, 'Didn't I tell you? Her men were killed in the wars.'

With a start Treleven One remembered the instructions with which he had been plied prior to the advent of Marie Thérèse.

Crestfallen and ashamed, he sought desperately to retrieve the situation by changing the subject.

Smiling at the silent Frenchwoman he began in a light conversational style—'Yes, *Hood* is the name. Heard of him all right, haven't you?'

'No,' said Marie Thérèse.

'One of our admirals—like Nelson. You've heard of him, my dear?'

'Yes,' admitted Marie Thérèse.

'What is it? What in the world is it?' Treleven One turned protestingly to Mrs. Treleven One, who had interrupted his facetiousness with another unusually *viciùs* dig in the ribs.

## 28

## BRITISH PHLEGM

'THE FRENCH HAVE no sense of humour.'

'The French have no vitality.'

In Kington Treleven One passed for an intellectual. On most subjects he had views his fellow-townsmen listened to with respect and now that he had a French grand-daughter it was only natural that he should know something worth listening to about France and the French.

'The French have no sense of humour.'

'The French have no vitality.'

'All things go in threes. Treleven One cast about him for a third characteristic to fill out the picture. It remained obstinately elusive.

The appearance of Marie Thérèse in the cobbled streets of Kington caused a stir.

'That's the French girl Jan Treleven's brought 'ome,' one whispered to another.

'Purty little maid, 'ent 'er?'

'What do 'ee think of your French grand-daughter, Mr. Treleven?' they asked Treleven One.

One waggish old matron dug him roguishly with her umbrella.

'Makes you wish you were young again, eh?' and jerked her head towards Marie Thérèse, who was disappearing down the street on her husband's arm.

Treleven One pursed his lips and followed the jerk with eyes that twinkled at the sight of Marie Thérèse's trim figure.

He sighed.

'Very nice, but the French—the French have no vitality.'

'What do you mean, Mr. Treleven?' asked his astonished audience.

'Father and grandfather both dead,' replied Treleven One, 'and if you added their combined ages together I could still give them ten years and I'm not dead yet. . . .'

'No, no vitality. . . .'

'What was the matter with them, Mr. Treleven?'

'Grandfather, internal trouble. Father went to pieces at forty.'

'But Mr. Treleven, she looks healthy enough.'

'I know, I know,' agreed Treleven One sepulchrally, 'but . . . no, no vitality.'

He sighed again, this time heavily but with resignation. He was standing in imagination not in Kington's London Road but by the graveside of his French grand-daughter, a pathetic desolate figure. She wouldn't last, no good hoping she would.

It was not until the following Tuesday that the third characteristic came to him. On Tuesday evenings Mr. Robert Henwood came to 'Sunrising' for his weekly game of chess.

Mr. Henwood was a serious rival to Treleven One for the position of oldest inhabitant of Kington. Indeed, he was a year older and looked like staying the course many a year yet. He was short and thick-set, swathed summer and winter in a tightly fitting black frock-coat with broad silk revers and a stiff upright collar bound with an immense white stock. His thin pursed lips and small intent eyes made him look as if he was always keeping in check some internal force which would one day violently explode. This may have been because Mr. Henwood was a retired banker. He had been something in a big London bank and was regarded locally as the repository of all the financial secrets of the last fifty years. He knew, so it was said, the state of affairs of every well-known man's bank balance in London. But of these mysteries he said no word. Indeed, about anything even when directly accosted he rarely replied with more than one word. Surpassing the German general who could be silent in nine languages, Mr. Robert Henwood could be silent in a thousand bank accounts.

To go to London at seventeen, to remain there fifty years in a bank and then to retire, may be a useful and worthy career but not an outstandingly spectacular one, a career, for example, which in colour and movement could not be compared with the years in office of an Indian Viceroy. Yet the simple folk of Kington always



looked upon Mr. Henwood's progress as one long cavalcade of splendour. When he went off as a youth they said he had got a splendid position. When year after year he came home for his annual fortnight they whispered that he was doing splendidly. At long last he had retired on a splendid pension.

'Splendid, yes,' sighed Kington, as Mr. Henwood made his way with solemn dignity through the town.

In Kington Mr. Henwood was now the honorary oracle on all financial matters. When people asked him what effect political changes would have on the financial status of the country he would reply 'critical', 'suicidal', 'desperate'. Once when a reckless Chancellor of the Exchequer had made a face at the City he went to the length of two words to characterize such foolhardiness—'Tempting Providence,' had said Mr. Henwood. Living for fifty years in the City, where more and more the tiny City churches began to look like the back parlour in the caretaker's rooms in the towering bank headquarters, Mr. Henwood had come to regard the decision of the leading financiers as omnipotent as a law of nature or a divine decree. To attack the City was like denouncing God. Both were blasphemous.

Only once did Mr. Henwood make a speech. It was at the height of the economic crisis of 1931. Kington would never forget it. It was quite extempore and delivered with passionate conviction outside the post office.

'One more crisis like this,' he said, 'and the whole financial structure of the country will be shattered from top to bottom.'

'I was there,' Treleven One used to say in describing the scene, 'I was there.'

Treleven One introduced Marie Thérèse to Mr. Henwood.

'Pleased,' said Mr. Henwood with his bob of a bow.

With Treleven One he climbed the slope to the seat at the top beneath the beetling crags and the gorse where they played in summer.

'French?' demanded Mr. Henwood trenchantly.

'Yes,' chuckled Treleven One. 'Nice little thing. French—nice people but—they've no sense of humour.'

'No,' agreed Mr. Henwood with a jerk.

'And they've no vitality.'

Mr. Henwood nodded assent. Then suddenly he ejaculated, 'Temperamental.'

'Temperamental!' Treleven One echoed the word as Archimedes may have cried out 'Eureka'.

It was the third characteristic for which he had been searching.

The French have no sense of humour.

The French have no vitality.

The French are temperamental.

Temperamental, of course. All foreigners are temperamental, the French above all.

Quite what did he mean by temperamental? Treleven One knew the word hit off the French to a "T". It was almost as if it had been invented for the French, but exactly what it meant he would have been puzzled to say. He must look it up in the dictionary.

Mr. Henwood came to his aid with another word.

'Emotional.'

'Emotional,' echoed Treleven One, delighted as before. The word had come like a prompt to an actor stuck for his words. Now he was off like a sail before a favouring breeze. 'Up one minute, down the next. Getting excited, frantic. Not like us. . . .'

He pointed dramatically across the bay. Tiny figures could be seen strolling about on the Hoe.

'If it had been Frenchmen there three hundred years ago,' he pursued, 'you wouldn't have heard them say, "We've time to finish our game and beat the Spaniards too."'

'Phlegm,' ejaculated Mr. Henwood.

'Phlegm,' cried his delighted echo. 'Phlegm. We stick our toes in and there we stick—do or die. The Frenchman—he's either rushing forward or rushing back. It's one or the other.'

'And then you know'—he was going on to descant upon the Frenchman's lack of a sense of the sea and of his ignorance of the food values of vegetables, particularly of marrows, when Mr. Henwood, with a characteristic marionette-like jerk, took one of his knights for nothing in return so he abandoned the French character to devote himself for the moment to the game.

When it was over both the old gentlemen sat silently smoking, watching the sun set behind the Hoe. For an hour it looked as though instead of taking its usual course it had plunged into the heart of Plymouth and set the whole place on fire. The sky above it was a mass of gold and red flames.

But Treleven One and Mr. Henwood smoked on tranquilly in the blessed certitude that no such fantastic thing could happen in their own well-regulated country. The houses edging the Hoe stood up sharply and solid as ever and behind them, they knew, in the narrow streets of the famous old town, the little toy trams were clattering round as before and the pavements would be thronged with carefree people.